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AN *ALTER KÄMPFER* AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE HOLOCAUST:
OTTO OHLENDORF BETWEEN CAREERISM AND NAZI FUNDAMENTALISM

A dissertation submitted in partial

fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

to the faculty of the department of

HISTORY

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

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Date Approved: _____

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ABSTRACT

AN *ALTER KÄMPFER* AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE HOLOCAUST: OTTO OHLENDORF BETWEEN CAREERISM AND NAZI FUNDAMENTALISM

Jennifer B. Capani

On April 7th, 1951, Holocaust perpetrator Otto Ohlendorf's death sentence was carried out according to the ruling of the United States Military Courts in Nuremberg. In *The United States vs. Otto Ohlendorf, et. al.*, leaders of the *Einsatzgruppen*, mobile killing units, were tried for war crimes which led to the deaths of millions of Jews and partisans. Under Ohlendorf's leadership of *Einsatzgruppen D*, more than 90,000 people were liquidated in the Ukraine. After this assignment, Ohlendorf resumed his position as head of Domestic Security in the Reich Security Main Office. As the war ended, he surrendered, and revealed the full scope of *Einsatzgruppen* activity, which eventually led to the second set of Nuremberg Trials. Outside of the Holocaust and the trial, little has been written on Ohlendorf. His academic career and ideology are insufficiently analyzed.

This dissertation analyzes Ohlendorf's life, career, and National Socialist ideology. The key factor in exploring his motivations is to fuse together careerism and ideology through his elite status as an *Alter Kämpfer*, "old fighter" and Nazi party member before 1933. From this designation, Ohlendorf enjoyed privileged employment, promotions, and a high level of trust within the party. Further explored is the placement of Ohlendorf into the historiographical debate, and how his ideology, career, trial, and death connected to his position as an *Alter Kämpfer*. Ultimately, analyzing the historiography reveals how memory has been fashioned in such ubiquitous topics as World War II, Nazi Germany, and the Holocaust.

To my father

William C. Volk, Jr.

for bringing history to me, and me to history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was first acquainted with the name Otto Ohlendorf when conducting secondary research in a graduate seminar for my Master's degree. It has been fifteen years since that seminar and as much as explored other areas of research, my doctoral research resumed by revisiting my initial study of Ohlendorf. I tried to escape from this project, and am so glad to have stuck with it. But this project is not all mine for which to take credit. Firstly, thank you to the unwavering support and expertise of my advisor, Dr. Dolores L. Augustine. Without her constant encouragement and precision editing, I would not have had the strength to write this essay. Thank you for believing in this project, and for believing in me.

My gratitude goes to the St. John's University History Department, specifically my committee members, Dr. Philip Misevich and Dr. Konrad Tuchscherer, to Dr. Timothy "The Wizard" Milford and Dr. Tracey-Anne Cooper for reading early sections and providing significant feedback, to Dr. Nerina Rustomji for motivating and encouraging me, even when I had little confidence to finish the program, and to Mrs. Fran Balla, without whom the department would not function and whose constant warmth, humor, and expertise made this process a little less painful.

I must thank all of the archivists and institutions who helped me locate and make sense of documents, and to everyone who read any drafts of this paper, at any phase, particularly Heather Palladino. To my friends and student colleagues, thanks for making me feel this project was feasible, even for a Wookie. To Marty "Crabs" Johnson for making yourself at my disposal for printing and shipping. Special thanks

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To my Mom, Jayne, no thank you is adequate, but the fact that you now appreciate history and want to learn more makes me so proud, and thanks to my sisters, Nicholle and Laurie, for always making fun of everything, including me. All three of you keep me grounded. To my grandfather, John B. Post (and all of the veterans in my family) for heroically serving our country in WWII, and for showing us all how to live a humble, grateful, life of service.

The person to whom this is dedicated, my father William C. Volk (“whitey”), first introduced me to history, WWII, the Nazis, the Holocaust, etc. I miss sitting down watching documentaries with you, telling you about my travels, seeing you get enraged over contemporary politics, and the best gift of all was how you and Mom got to experience history with me coming to visit me in Germany, especially going to Auschwitz. This is for you.

Lastly, there are no thanks sufficient for the sacrifices made by my husband, David. Your constant encouragement and patience have made this whole thing possible. Without you, this project may never have happened and although our long journey together, beginning as high school sweethearts, has been unconventional, I would not trade it for a second. Your support, strength of character, kindness, and humor are what keep me going. Finally, to our hilarious, stubborn, intelligent, sassy,

sweet daughter, Yvonne, you are our entire world and hope that when you, and your sibling-to-be, grow up you are, above all else, passionate and kind.

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Chapter I:

Introduction

Otto Ohlendorf, was part of a select group of elitist Nazi party members, the *Alte Kämpfer* (or “old fighters”), where special privileges, including employment and promotions, were given to the first 100,000 NSDAP (Nazi party) members. These men, including Ohlendorf, were recognized as the earliest and most devoted party members, having joined prior to Hitler’s election to the Chancellorship in 1933. Ohlendorf was party number 6531. The *Alte Kämpfer* were awarded with these three particular decorations to distinguish them from new party members. These awards included the *Ehrenwinkel für Alte Kämpfer* (silver chevron, worn on the right arm of the uniform), the *Goldenes Partiabzeichen* (Golden Badge of Honor, a circular two-toned medal given by Hitler to indicate outstanding contributions to the party) and the *Medaille zur Erinnerung an den 9. November 1923* (or the Blood Order Medal, given only to participants in the 1923 Munich Beer Hall Putsch).¹ Ohlendorf was given the first two awards and he is seen in Illustration 1, wearing the Golden Badge of Honor, below his left pocket button.

These awards were worn particularly on official uniforms but the Golden Badge was a pin that could be removed and put on a suit for everyone to see. These were indicators of prestige and benefit flowed from being recognized as a veteran of the struggle. Ohlendorf’s career was certainly privileged: He was continually promoted until he reached the highest strata possible in the Nazi party. But *Alter*

¹ Jean-Denis G.G. Lepage, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Third Reich* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2014), 7, 8.

Kämpfer was not just an honorific, it was a lifestyle and was a consistent reminder of why he joined the party. He was a devoted National Socialist and careerist who was successful at every phase of his career, including when he led the murder of 90,000 Jews and partisans with the *Einsatzgruppen*.² Key to understanding how Ohlendorf's career and ideology fit together is by analyzing his identity as an *Alter Kämpfer*.³

² *Alter Kämpfer* will be referenced throughout the dissertation. There is no definitive source on this subject but for some general information see Dietrich Orlow, *The Nazi Party, 1919-1945: A Complete History* (New York: Enigma, 2010), Randall Bytwerk, "Und Ihr habt doch gesiegt: Rhetorical functions of a Nazi holiday." *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* (1979): 134-146, Christoph Schmidt, "Zu den Motiven 'alter Kämpfer' in der NSDAP," in Detlev Peukert and Jürgen Reulecke, eds., *Die Reihen fast geschlossen. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alltags unterm Nationalsozialismus* (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1981), Ted Harrison, "'Alter Kämpfer' im Widerstand. Graf Helldorff, die NS-Bewegung und die Opposition gegen Hitler," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (1997): 385-423, Martin Kipp, "Privilegien für „alte Kämpfer“—Zur Geschichte der SA-Berufsschulen," in Manfred Heinemann, hg., *Erziehung und Schulung im Dritten Reich. Teil 1: Kindergarten, Schule, Jugend, Berufserziehung*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta. 289–300, Winfried Süß, *Der "Volkskörper" im Krieg: Gesundheitspolitik, Gesundheitsverhältnisse und Krankenmord im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland 1939-1945* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2003), Carl Friedrich Graumann, *Psychologie im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 1985), Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's foreign workers: enforced foreign labor in Germany under the Third Reich* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

³ It is important to note that in Ohlendorf's "*Personal Bericht*" and many other official files from the *Bundesarchiv*, indicate that he was given the *Alte Kämpfer* awards. His resumés included these accolades. Some of the references are Berlin *Bundesarchiv*, Nachlaß, Personal-Akte, Ohlendorf, Otto, SS-Nr. 880 (microfilm) pages 862, 866, 870, 889, 943, and in RG 361, 2527, document number 126144 "*Parteistatistische Erhebung 1939*." There are many more, but this is an example of the frequency of reference of his *Alter Kämpfer* status.



Illustration I. Otto Ohlendorf in 1943.

There is no real biography written of Otto Ohlendorf. In 1951, he was executed by hanging at Landsberg prison in Germany, after being tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity. He lived imprisoned for three years after he was sentenced and filed appeals to his sentence. He accepted his sentence in that he took responsibility for the murder of 90,000 people, but never admitted guilt, in any

⁴ Illustration I: Otto Ohlendorf, “*Porträt Otto Ohlendorf in Uniform als SS-Brigadeführer*,” November 19, 1943, *Bundesarchiv*, Berlin (accessed August, 2017) http://www.bild.bundesarchiv.de/archives/barchpic/search/1504768780/?switch_lang=de. Note this is the original file citation but it is watermarked. For the purposes of this dissertation, this photo was acquired from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_Ohlendorf#/media/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-J08517,_Otto_Ohlendorf.jpg which cites the precise information from the *Bundesarchiv*.

form. To him, and the dozens of other perpetrators tried in several sets of Nuremberg trials, his actions were completely justified. Murdering the Jews and partisans of Europe was in self-defense of Germany where, to Ohlendorf, they held back the progress of the Aryan race and their elimination was necessary. Ohlendorf was not alone in this defense, nor did he demonstrate any remorse. Why should he? In his mind, and in the mind of many a Nazi perpetrator, the Jews were the enemy of Germany. Among several other issues, this dissertation attempts to further analyze the transition Ohlendorf made from that of a highly professional policy-maker to the leader of a unit that perpetrated massive pogroms against Jews and partisans in Crimea, demonstrating the links between these two phases of his career.

Ohlendorf exemplified the ideal Nazi: the highly educated career professional who thrived in Nazi Germany through merit-based promotions. Ohlendorf's career was defined by his expertise in economics, law and the political economy. He headed trade organizations and worked for the Ministry of Economics. For all intents and purposes, Ohlendorf embodied everything the Nazi party wanted: He was intelligent, devoted to the party, devoted to Germany and his family, and most significantly, devoted to National Socialist ideology. However, part of his life and career haunted Ohlendorf after he surrendered to the Allies. He hoped to convince his captors he was useful to them for his insider knowledge of the Nazi system and the Third Reich. Instead, it became known to the Allies that he was transferred to lead *Einsatzgruppe D*. Under his command, 90,000 Jews and partisans were murdered *en masse* in the Soviet Union. This part of his career defined his entire career and how he is most remembered in history.

For decades following the end of the Second World War, historians have focused their research and analysis on several aspects of Ohlendorf's life: his career as an economist, his role as a perpetrator in the Holocaust, and the trial. In recent years, there has been a shift in what aspects of Ohlendorf's life are researched, including a study of *Einsatzgruppe D*, itself. However, what is missing is a comprehensive look at the entirety of Ohlendorf's life and career. What can be learned from a study like this is how Ohlendorf demonstrated dissent within the party, what his personal views were regarding anti-Semitism, on what grounds he claimed that his interpretation of National Socialist ideology was pure, and how this reflected fragmentation of beliefs within the party itself. His work reflects a particular kind of radicalism, whereby he initiated policy and solutions based on activist politics, often at odds with officials in his own party. A comprehensive study of Ohlendorf's life and career will allow us to better understand his place in history, not only in the context of his trial and culpability, but of the history of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. This is the goal of this thesis.

Biographical Sketch

On February 4th, 1907, Otto Ohlendorf was born in Hoheneggelsen, near Hannover. His family owned a farm and he was the second of four children; two brothers and one sister. Influenced by his older brother, Ohlendorf became interested in politics at an early age. He was *SS (Schutzstaffel)* member number 880

and Nazi Party member number 6531.⁵ This made him a member of the elite class of Nazi party members called the *Alter Kämpfer*, or “old fighter.” He joined the party in 1925, at the age of eighteen, and the SS a year later. The timing of his Nazi party membership would benefit him throughout his career as the “*Alter Kämpfer*” enjoyed special privileges of employment and promotion.⁶ He was expected to become a farmer but instead earned a degree in jurisprudence and began graduate work in the field of political economy. In 1931, he was awarded a scholarship for a student exchange to the University of Pavia, Italy where he became an expert on Fascism, learned to despise it, therefore solidifying his commitment to National Socialist ideology. In 1934, Ohlendorf married Käthe Wolpers, they had five children together and were a typical family devoted to National Socialism.

Upon his return to Germany, he practiced law in the district and regional courts and was recruited by Prof. Dr. Jens Jessen, head of the University of Kiel’s Institute for World Economics and Maritime Trade, to teach economics and build up the new department of economics. After less than a year, Ohlendorf and Jessen were driven out because of their radical economic theories, which were critical of the Nazi Party. Ohlendorf followed Jessen to Berlin, where their new academic stint was short-lived, for similar reasons. In 1936, when Ohlendorf’s time in academia was over, he applied for and was employed by the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) (which in 1939

⁵ For his membership numbers, they are listed on the cover of all documents in the German Federal Archives. One such document set is “*Personalnachweis*” in *Bundesarchiv* Berlin Nachlaß Ohlendorf, Otto, Personal-Akte, SS-nr. 880, 862, microfilm.

⁶ Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria, 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) index, xiii. In later sections of this thesis, *Alter Kämpfer* will be addressed more thoroughly.

became the RSHA {*Reichsicherheitshauptamt*, or Reich Security Main Office}, in charge of domestic intelligence). Here, he used spies to acquire information for public opinion reports. These reports cited many aspects of the Reich including the economy, public attitudes toward a variety of issues, and the Nazi party itself. He gained a reputation for conducting thorough research on the Reich and wrote weekly reports on the collected data, which often reflected on particulars of German life negatively. Heinrich Himmler, *Reichsführer SS*, openly criticized Ohlendorf's negativity and dismissed the reports.

Despite the grudge against Ohlendorf held by Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich, head of the *RSHA*, Ohlendorf continued to thrive in his career. This is, without question, because he was an *Alter Kämpfer* whose loyalty to the party was unassailable, overriding any squabbles he had with other party members. Also, the elite *Alte Kämpfer* club warranted privilege throughout his, and other members', careers. In 1941, in an alleged attempt to punish Ohlendorf for insubordination, he was ultimately transferred to the eastern front to lead *Einsatzgruppe D*. Despite twice refusing the position, Ohlendorf conceded, and as leader of *Einsatzgruppe D*, he excelled with the same kind of dedication as in any other part of his career, compiling reports in similar form and tone as in other areas of his career. He was driven by his commitment to National Socialist ideology and the Nazi party, but in this case, was not conducting public opinion polls, writing economic policy or doing anything academic. Ohlendorf's group of five hundred men were wrangling up innocent people and murdering them, execution style.

Following his time as head of an *Einsatzgruppe*, Ohlendorf resumed his role in the RSHA and assumed additional roles in the Ministry of Economics and trade groups. As the end of the war became inevitable, Ohlendorf's pragmatic nature tended to accept the outcome and devise a post-war economic recovery plan. One of the last Nazis to remain at the headquarters in Berlin, Ohlendorf fled to Flensburg with the provisional government that was set up to run in lieu of Hitler (and upon his suicide). On May 23rd, 1945, he surrendered himself to the Allies, thinking his expertise on the inner-working of the government would prove useful and that he might still be offered a position in whatever transitional government would be set up to rebuild Germany. He was grossly mistaken and his actions with the *Einsatzgruppen* were exposed as criminal genocide.

Thanks to Ohlendorf's apparent candor, frankness and willingness to offer information to the Allies, a second set of Nuremberg Trials was set up solely to deal with the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen*, in Case 9, *The United States of America v. Otto Ohlendorf, et al.* Ohlendorf was the lead defendant in a trial to determine war crimes and crimes against humanity. A trained lawyer himself, Ohlendorf plead not guilty and defended his actions by invoking the *Führerbefehl* (under order of the Führer), saying he was given orders to follow. After three years in captivity, thousands of hours of interviews, interrogations and testimony given, pleas, affidavits and sworn statements made, Ohlendorf was charged with three counts of war crimes and sentenced to death by hanging.

He filed appeals and mobilized a group of supporters, and although most of the original sentences of the twenty-four accused in his trial were commuted, or at

least shortened, Ohlendorf was hanged on June 8th, 1951. He was forty-three years old and left a wife with five young children behind. Upon his death, Ohlendorf never wavered in his devotion to National Socialism and never expressed remorse for the crimes he committed, as he did not see the murder of innocent people as a crime. A comprehensive analysis of his life and career begins here and will highlight under-researched aspects. Shown are patterns of behavior befitting a true loyalist *Alter Kämpfer*, with ultimate careerist drive, and a consistency in ideology throughout Nazi Germany.

Searching for Clues to Ohlendorf's Motivations

Historians have long studied Nazi Germany, World War II, the Holocaust, the Nuremberg Trials, perpetrator motivations, the *Einsatzgruppen*, the Nazi economy, and many other topics related to this dissertation. The utopian quest to find a singular document, the key that answered all questions concerning Ohlendorf's motivations, remorse, trial strategy, etc., one that focused on Ohlendorf's thought-process at various phases of his life, simply failed. A document like this may have been destroyed or never existed at all. Therefore, this dissertation builds on the work of other historians, hoping to make a modest contribution to a vast field. My work has been influenced by numerous papers, articles, books, authors, websites, etc., and remains incomplete. In the future, I hope to acquire full access to more archival materials. For a more detailed analysis of source materials, please see the historiography section of this dissertation.

There have been considerable shifts in views on the place of the Holocaust in history. Doris Bergen's *War and Genocide* is significant because it forces readers to fuse together and think critically about historical context.⁷ In this case, the Second World War and the Holocaust were inseparable occurrences and to analyze the Holocaust as a singular event does not provide the appropriate framework for topical analysis. This is a significant study demonstrative of new trends in the field.

Along with Bergen's book, Daniel Blatman, in *The Death Marches*, has recently contributed to historiography by forcing historians to rethink the phases of the Holocaust, placing the death marches not as an epilogue to the events of the Holocaust, but as the final phase of it.⁸ An undetermined number of people perished in these marches and Blatman emphasizes the role of locals in perpetrating genocide. Focusing on case studies like Majdanek, Blatman argues that the Holocaust was more improvised and scattered than previously thought.

Arguably the book that most influenced my research is Catherine Epstein's *Model Nazi: Arthur Greiser and the Occupation of Western Poland*.⁹ Epstein's ability to

⁷ Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Lanham, M.D.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016) and Doris Bergen, *The Holocaust: A Concise History* (Plymouth, U.K.: Rowman and Littlefield, Inc., 2009).

⁸ Daniel Blatman, *The Death Marches: The Final Phase of Nazi Genocide* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011). For more on the Death Marches see Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), Joseph Freeman and Donald Schwartz, *The Road to Hell: Recollections of the Nazi Death March* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1998), Andrzej Strzelecki, *The Evacuation, Dismantling and Liberation of KL Auschwitz* (Oświęcim, Poland: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2001), and Michael R. Marrus, ed., *The End of the Holocaust* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1989).

⁹ Catherine Epstein, *Model Nazi: Arthur Grieser and the Occupation of Western Poland* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

fuse together a complete account of Greiser's career with significant issues in the study of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust is a model to historians of the Holocaust. I am grateful that the general historiography has shifted back into a biographical mode. Nazi Germany was not the well-oiled machine previously thought. It was multi-dimensional and had real human beings making decisions relevant to humanity. This is why we study both Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. The incomprehensibly horrific decision to murder 6,000,000, one third of all the Jews of Europe was not a crime conducted by mindless fools. The Holocaust was perpetuated by the Ohlendorfs of Germany.

On the subject of anti-Semitism, countless studies, articles and books have been written. Even from an early age, school-aged children now read good general studies that analyze the history of the persecution of Jews. The best known are Elie Wiesel's *Night* and the *Diary of Anne Frank*.¹⁰ These books raise important questions of how to define and contextualize persecution and the Holocaust. Other general studies of anti-Semitism have been useful to this paper and include Robert

¹⁰ Anne Frank, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1952) and Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Avon Books, 1969). Other relevant books by and about Wiesel are Ellen Normal Stern, *Elie Wiesel: A Voice for Humanity* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), Thomas J. Vinciguerra, ed., *Conversations with Elie Wiesel* (New York: Schocken Books, 2001), Harry J. Cargas, ed., *Responses to Elie Wiesel: Critical Essay by Major Jewish and Christian Scholars* (New York: Persea Books, 1978) and Harry J. Cargas, ed., *Telling the Tale: A Tribute to Elie Wiesel on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday* (St. Louis: Time Being Books, 1993), Wiesel, *A Beggar in Jerusalem: A Novel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), Wiesel, *Night, Dawn, The Accident: A Trilogy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004). For more on Anne Frank and related works see Miep Gies, *Anne Frank Remembered: The Story of the Woman Who Helped to Hide the Frank Family* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), Jennifer Hansen, ed., *Anne Frank* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2003), and Carol Ann Lee, *Roses from the Earth: The Biography of Anne Frank* (London: Viking, 1999).

Wistrich's *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred*, Shmuel Almog's *Antisemitism Through the Ages*, Richard Levy's *Antisemitism in the Modern World* and many more.¹¹ These kinds of works show the origins of anti-Semitism, how hatred was bred and persecution conducted over centuries. Important to the study of Ohlendorf is analyzing the origins and evolution of anti-Semitism culminating in the Holocaust.

The Holocaust is the ultimate example of the long-ingrained cultural, religious and societal persecution of the Jewish population of Europe. Numerous studies have been conducted concerning the Nazis' ideological anti-Semitism. Taking racial hatred and transforming it into the systematic destruction of the Jews was the brainchild of Nazi Germany. The actions of the Nazis in successfully murdering two-thirds of Europe's Jews have been critically analyzed by historians and scholars from a variety of disciplines including economics, psychology, and sociology. In addition, studies of racial supremacy and eugenics dominate the literature. It is well-known that the Nazis were notorious for conducting experiments on Jews and unwanted persons: especially Dr. Josef Mengele at Auschwitz.¹² Some of the authors writing on these topics include Yehuda Bauer,

¹¹ Shmuel Almog, ed., *Antisemitism Through the Ages* (Oxford: Pergammon Press, 1998), *Antisemitism in the Modern World: An Anthology of Texts* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1990), and Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991). Among these mentioned, for more general books on anti-Semitism see Ron Rosenbaum, ed., *Those Who Forget the Past: The Question of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Random House, 2004), David I. Kertzer, ed., *Old Demons, New Debates: Anti-Semitism in the West* (Teaneck, NJ: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 2005), Michael Fineberg, Shimon Samuels, and Mark Weitzman, eds., *Antisemitism: The Generic Hatred: Essay in Memory of Simon Wiesenthal* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007), and Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, *Antisemitism: Myth and Hate from Antiquity to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

¹² There are many books on Auschwitz, Mengele, Eugenics and Nazi medical experiments. For medical experiments see Götz Aly, Peter Chroust, and Christian Pross,

Hannah Arendt, Israel Gutman, Raul Hilberg, Saul Friedländer, Richard Breitman, Omer Bartov, Alan Bullock, George Mosse, Michael R. Marrus, Helmut Krausnick, Jackson Spielvogel, Hilary Earl, Michael Wildt, Adam Tooze, Götz Aly, Daniel J.

Goldhagen, and Christopher Browning.¹³ This list of authors is incredibly brief but

Cleansing the Fatherland: Nazi Medicine and Racial Hygiene (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), Ernst Klee, *Auschwitz, die NS-Medizin und ihre Opfer* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1997), Benno Müller-Hill, *Murderous Science: Elimination by Scientific Selection of Jews, Gypsies, and Others in Germany, 1933-1945* (Plainview, NY: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, 1998), Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986). For Mengele see John F. Grabowski, *Josef Mengele* (San Diego, CA: Lucent Books, 2004), and Simon Wiesenthal, "The Man Who Collected Blue Eyes," in Simon Wiesenthal and Joseph Wechsberg, eds., *The Murderers Among Us: The Simon Wiesenthal Memoirs* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967). On eugenics see Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: "Euthanasia" in Germany c. 1900-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to Auschwitz* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995). For racial science see Christian Pross, and Götz Aly, *The Value of the Human Being: Medicine in Germany 1918-1945* (Berlin: Arztekammer Berlin, 1991), Gisela Bock, "Sterilization and 'Medical' Massacres in National Socialist Germany: Ethics, Politics, and the Law," In *Medicine and Modernity: Public Health and Medical Care in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Germany*, edited by Manfred Berg and Geoffrey Cocks, 149-172 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

¹³ This list is short but some of the most influential general topic books not included in specific citations in this essay are Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (New York: F. Watts, 1982) and many others, Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1969), Israel Gutman, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*. (New York: Macmillan, 1990), Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York: Knopf, 1991) and *Official Secrets: What the Nazis Planned, What the British and Americans Knew* (New York: Hill and Wang/Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1998), Henry Friedlander, "The Manipulation of Language," in *The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy, and Genocide*, edited by Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton (Millwood, NY: Kraus International, 1980), Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing and Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), Helmut Krausnick, Martin Broszat, et al., *Anatomy of the SS State* (London: Harper Collins, 1968), Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (New York: Routledge, 2002), Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2016) and Michael Berenbaum, *The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1993).

each of their works, plus the writings of countless others, has directly influenced this thesis.

Central to this dissertation are three themes. Firstly, this thesis is an analysis of motivation. The key to understanding the connection between Ohlendorf's National Socialist ideology and careerism is exploring his identity as an *Alter Kämpfer*. Without this important bridge between ideology and career, the explanation of why he was so dedicated and why his career was so privileged remains superficial and speculative. The second theme addresses historiographical themes of intentionalism and functionalism. Analyzing Ohlendorf within the context of how historians have viewed the implementation of the Holocaust shows how scholars have shifted the bulk of responsibility from either Hitler or Germany as a whole, to a newer melding of the two positions together. In other words, the polarizing debate over blame for genocide has morphed into a combination of both intent and function together. The final theme addresses Ohlendorf's level and blame and guilt within the context of the *SS-Einsatzgruppen* Nuremberg Trials. This theme unpacks some critical issues concerning his own defense strategy. But here, the key to better understanding Ohlendorf's defense, career, ideology, motivation and actions are best seen through his identity as an *Alter Kämpfer*.

Examining the Sources

In general, the most influential set of documents on Ohlendorf is the transcript from the trial. It not only includes Ohlendorf's own words in the testimony, affidavits, and archival footage, which is incredibly useful to understand

tone and emotion from the documents, but also shows how the prosecution, judges and fellow defendants reacted to Ohlendorf. I have relied on the transcripts, films, etc. but did so aware of the inherent bias present in court testimony, especially testimony where the outcome was the possibility of the death penalty. There are problems that will be addressed later in this paper concerning the trial. However, this part of the source material cannot and should not be ignored. Much can be inferred from carefully listening to courtroom dialogue. Testimony from the trial, coupled with other statements on or by Ohlendorf from different periods of his life provides a better understanding of the context of and reasoning behind his testimony.

Most of the transcripts are available in published books, like John Mendelsohn's *Trials of War Criminals*, and are on good credible websites like the Yale University Lillian Goldman Law Library's "The Avalon Project," which cataloged the International Military Tribunal records.¹⁴ In addition, primary research for this dissertation was conducted at the *Bundesarchiv* Berlin, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, MD and in Washington, D.C.

Another important set of sources from the *Einsatzgruppen* Trial are memoirs from Chief Judge Michael Musmanno, and Prosecutors Telford Taylor and Whitney

¹⁴ John Mendelsohn, ed., *Nuernberg. War Crimes Trials Records of Case 9: United States of America v. Otto Ohlendorf et. al* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, Special List, 1978), 3 January, 1946. This source will be hereafter referenced as Mendelsohn, *WCT*, and the page number or date of testimony. "The Avalon Project" Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy," Yale University Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/default.asp>.

Harris, and Benjamin Ferencz, who is still alive today and remains vocal in interviews, lectures, public appearances, and on his website. Memoirs from Ohlendorf's contemporaries are also useful, describing Ohlendorf's character and chronicling his conversations and viewpoints. Felix Kersten, Himmler's personal physician and masseur, is an example of an insider who knew and frequently conversed with Ohlendorf. Not forgetting the inherent bias in a memoir, Kersten's book is telling of the relationship between Ohlendorf and Himmler. Kersten portrays Ohlendorf as misguided Nazi ideologue with whom Himmler found fault thanks to Ohlendorf's notoriously stubborn, know-it-all personality.

I found significant material at the Federal German Archive (*Bundesarchiv*) in Berlin, including Ohlendorf's personnel files, birth record, assorted papers such as awards, official documents from the Economics Ministry, the war department, census materials, and medical forms. Useful materials like his promotion sheets, performance evaluations, personally drafted versions of his resumé, and transfer requests were all read, translated and utilized for this thesis. All translations of primary sources were completed by this author, with frequent questions, consultations and cross-checking by my advisor. This archival trip also proved fruitful in obtaining general personnel files, original SS and Nazi party membership forms, medals, awards, and honors received, letters written by Jessen on Ohlendorf's behalf, documents in his own handwriting, and many other documents in the hundreds, some on microfilm, others available in the original and photocopied. The documents acquired here are the foundation of research for this entire dissertation.

Through correspondence with archivists at the IFZ-München (*Institut für Zeitgeschichte*, or Institute for Contemporary History), I was able to order a number of documents from there. In particular, a letter from Käthe Ohlendorf to David Irving is used extensively throughout the entirety of this dissertation. However, although many of her husband's personal papers, letters, etc. were bequeathed to the IFZ after her death in 1983, there is no index to the entire collection. Searching the collection for specific documents is challenging, and I was unable to visit the archive. Until the materials are properly catalogued and linked to their online database, searching by document title is the best option. Nevertheless, the staff were helpful and continue to assist with questions concerning their collection of Ohlendorf materials.

Published primary sources like *The Einsatzgruppen Reports and Meldungen aus dem Reich* were tremendously helpful, translated to English and easily navigable. Robert Gellately's edited book, based on Dr. Leon Goldensohn's interviews of Ohlendorf in prison, was particularly significant to this study, especially the probing questions concerning Ohlendorf's family and opinion of anti-Semitism. His assessment of Ohlendorf's character is in line with my own findings regarding traits present from the beginning to the end of his life.

Chapter Organization

Throughout this paper certain themes arise involving Ohlendorf, culpability, Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. Particularly addressed are themes of guilt, justice, motivation, and anti-Semitism, to name a few. Other subtler topics in the greater

historiography are extensively analyzed here. These include careerism, activism, academics, Nazi economics, religion, persecution, and, most significantly, National Socialist ideology. A key component to this study is to use certain under-researched aspects of Ohlendorf's life to fill the historiographical gaps. Ultimately, what I have found is that Ohlendorf's life and career were not only reflective of his identity as an ideal Nazi careerist, but that as an *Alter Kämpfer*, his devotion to National Socialism was exponentially more fervent than that of average party members.

This dissertation is comprised of four major parts, an introduction and conclusion, and is chronologically organized. The following chapter is a historiographical analysis. Aside from what is mentioned here in the introduction, this section of the paper focuses on what has been written about Ohlendorf and what directly pertains to him. Analyzed here are the gaps in historiography where Ohlendorf's life and career have either been studied or where there is a need for further study. Questions that are raised in this chapter include: how participation in the Holocaust fits into the broader biography of the perpetrator; where in the historiography are there gaps in Ohlendorf's life; what historians say about perpetrator intent and motivation; how Ohlendorf's life and career have been interpreted; and how a comprehensive study of Ohlendorf can contribute to a greater understanding of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. This chapter also addresses the important intentionalist/functionalist debate in historiography which concerns when, how and from whom the Holocaust was planned, implemented, and carried out.

Chapter three is an analysis of Ohlendorf's early life and career and how it was driven by his dedication to National Socialist ideology. Chronicling Ohlendorf's life and career, some of the main parts discussed are his upbringing and education, the solidification of his commitment to National Socialism, his *Alter Kämpfer* loyalty and dedication, his law career, his period in academia, career change to the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*) which morphed into the RSHA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*), and then there is a break in the chronology: Ohlendorf's transfer to the *Einsatzgruppen*. It was necessary to create a continuous career flow for Ohlendorf and to do so, removing the *Einsatzgruppen* section created its own chapter. Although I argue this part of his career was crucial to his meteoric ascension up the party ranks, Ohlendorf himself described it as a blemish on his record, which is why it is separate. This is most likely because it was the only part of his career in which he was held accountable for genocide. Lastly discussed is his post-*Einsatzgruppen* career in the Reich until the surrender.

What this section does is point to important aspects National Socialist ideology, Ohlendorf's professional successes as a result of his transfer to the *Einsatzgruppen* in the Ukraine, and his alleged reluctance to be transferred. Also analyzed are Ohlendorf's view of the middle class (*Mittelstand*), where he broke away from the party by taking the interest of the middle-class very seriously as central to German society, a position that clashed with the realities of the Nazi system. This is an indicator of his different interpretation of National Socialist ideology. He had a sort of populist vision for German society that focused on majority rule and disdain for minorities. In other words, the people should have a

direct say in how the country was run. Significantly, Ohlendorf demonstrated opposition to his fellow Nazis, especially Himmler, in a very indirect way: through the details of the public opinion reports and by secretly designing a post-war economic recovery plan with a new government. The larger implications of this show that he was not necessarily ideologically aligned with the Nazi party platform, that he lost faith in the success of the Nazi regime, and that despite his arrogance to challenge Himmler on many issues his status as an *Alter Kämpfer* prevented his reprimand. The most important question addressed in this chapter deals with Ohlendorf's personality. If he and Himmler had such a personal feud, why was he never fired? Instead, Ohlendorf's career thrived. He was an important figure in the Reich and the quintessential example of his generation of highly educated activist reformers whom the Nazis employed. Ohlendorf shared many characteristics with highly educated men of his generation who became leaders of RSHA sections or were sent to the front to serve as *Einsatzgruppen* commanders and deputies.

Chapter four deals solely with the *Einsatzgruppen*. Discussed here are the motivations and reasons surrounding Ohlendorf's transfer to a leadership position with *Einsatzgruppe D*. While on trial, Ohlendorf continually stated he was opposed to the transfer and that Himmler was treating him unfairly. This cannot really be proven without a doubt, although it can be assumed there is some truth to his objections. Notions of *Blutkitt* (blood cement), or implicating officials in the crimes of the Nazis by inducing them to participate, underlay attempts to manipulate men like Ohlendorf into accepting that enacting mass murder was part of the Nazi career path. Ohlendorf was responsible for the murder of more than 90,000 innocent

people. How does a man go from being an academic who criticized the Reich for not being more purist in ideology to become a mass murderer? Although Ohlendorf was allegedly hesitant to accept this position, he performed his duties with the same fervor, efficiency, and distinction as his Reich desk job. Interesting to this section, despite enacting mass murder, Ohlendorf was sure to take care of his “soldiers” and ensure that their mental health was his priority. In other words, the psychological effect of performing murder was the chief concern of Ohlendorf, and he made sure to testify to this. He was never sorry for these tasks or for this career path.

Chapter five begins with Ohlendorf’s surrender, leading to the trial. This section deals with the issues surrounding how Ohlendorf became the lead witness in the second set of Nuremberg trials, also known as the *Einsatzgruppen* Trials or Case 9: *The United States of America v. Otto Ohlendorf, et al.* When Ohlendorf was captured, he thought his captors wanted inside information on the Reich that he could provide. What he did not expect was that, true to his personality, known for frankness and insufferable honesty, he would divulge so much information that eventually it came out that he was an *Einsatzgruppen* leader. When pressed and interrogated, Ohlendorf, matter-of-factly, admitted involvement in the mass murder of 90,000 Jews and partisans. In addition to the trial, Ohlendorf’s appeals process is briefly mentioned, along with the idea that he should be tried as part of the Wehrmacht, and not as a war criminal. During the trial, he used this as a defense strategy, but this argument has some validity because the *Einsatzgruppen* were mobile killing units, sent in after the invasion of Russia, and were attached to army divisions. Justice is a significant part of the discussion. Hilary Earl criticized the

process by and in which many of the Nuremberg perpetrators were tried. Ohlendorf was sentenced to death and his sentence was upheld until after his execution in 1951. Most other perpetrators on trial had their sentences commuted. The politics of the Cold War helped influence the decision of the court to uphold Ohlendorf's death by hanging.

This dissertation details the life and career of Otto Ohlendorf with the goal of beginning a more comprehensive biography than previously compiled. It is just a beginning because much more research needs to be conducted in order to create the best working biography possible. Why is studying Ohlendorf important? It demonstrates not only usual trends in the scholarship of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust such as perpetrator motivation, but his life also shows a high level of dedication to National Socialism as an ideology. He became an alleged "unwilling" perpetrator with the *Einsatzgruppen*, but nevertheless performed his tasks and was able to justify the murder of more than 90,000 people, as a loyalist *Alter Kämpfer*. How could a person of apparently intellect become a mass murderer? Outside of the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen*, Ohlendorf contributed much to securing the future of German recovery and success by advocating for middle class reform. He was a reformer and outspoken, probably insufferable, critic of the Nazi party and really thought he could fix the problem by addressing issues that were significant to the German public.

Unfortunately, Ohlendorf's idealistic, purist views of National Socialism were a disappointment. He realized he could affect little in terms of party politics. In fact, he, and others of his generation of Nazi officials-turned-mass murderers, began their

careers as activist reformers. Whatever good he did for the German economy is negated in history because he chose to accept being transferred to the *Einsatzgruppen* and chose to implement the murderous racial policies of the Third Reich. Without excusing these atrocities in any way, this paper intends to incorporate more than the heinous parts of his life and career into a singular narrative, one that places National Socialist devotion at the center of Ohlendorf's life, death and career.

Chapter 2:

Ohlendorf and Historiographical Debates

Introduction

There are many difficulties in writing a comprehensive analysis of Otto Ohlendorf's life, and few attempts have been made. This chapter provides an overview of what others have written about Ohlendorf's career outside of the Nuremberg *Einsatzgruppen* trial. Looking at his life in its entirety shows how significant National Socialist ideology was in his career. At each point in his career, Ohlendorf strove to outperform his colleagues, and at times, held them directly accountable to the Nazi belief system. The most condemnable phase in Ohlendorf's activist career was his tenure with the *Einsatzgruppen*, during which, under his command, 90,000 Jews and partisans were murdered. Even when he directly commanded genocide, he performed with the same dedication to National Socialist ideology as in all other phases of his career. Ohlendorf certainly did not foresee having to pay for these horrendous crimes with his life. Even then, though with alleged reluctance, he performed his duties with complete fidelity to National Socialism. His activities as *Einsatzgruppen* commander have yielded the greatest volume of analysis on Ohlendorf, and rightfully so. However, certain points in his career have been under-analyzed. Searching for a more comprehensive study of Ohlendorf's career, as a whole, demonstrates that there is a need for the historiography to better tie his Holocaust perpetration to his work in academia, in the running of the national economy, and as head of AMT III in the RSHA

(*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, or Reich Security Main Office). There is no disconnect between the phases of his career, and analyzing them together demonstrates that the one most significant aspect of his life that transcended his career, personality and life is his devotion to National Socialism. He was, without question, and certainly in his mind, the keeper of the Holy Grail of Nazi ideology.

There are three parts to this chapter. Presented firstly is an analysis of Otto Ohlendorf in a historiographical context. The various parts of his life and career together gives us something new: insight on the influence of being an *Alter Kämpfer*, how careerism drove Ohlendorf to become responsible for genocide, and how he questioned the conduct of the Nazi party and the ideology of National Socialism. The analysis follows particular phases in his life and career. Most of these phases have been under-researched, with the exception of the Nuremberg Trials. The objective is to look at Ohlendorf's life in a more complete way, seeing what parts of his career demand further exploration by scholars and why. Particular questions arise in the historiography, mostly concerning gaps in scholarship: Why has no one written a real, complete biography of Ohlendorf? Are there inadequate, inaccessible or possibly destroyed primary sources that cannot be looked at? What can be learned from his academic career? How does that apply to intellectual trends in the Reich? Why is there so little written about the public opinion reports? Is what historians know about Ohlendorf too much based of what *he* said at Nuremberg and in captivity? Is it meaningful to look merely at the deeds of a perpetrator rather than the whole picture and life of a person? These, and other questions, are what drive the themes of this dissertation: to address the incompleteness of a

historiography of Ohlendorf and to place a study of his life and career into the scope of the so-called “intentionalist/functionalist debate.”

The second part addresses the historian Daniel J. Goldhagen and the intentionalist/functionalist debates. These important historiographical debates sparked a feud in the field of Nazi Germany and Holocaust studies in which historians took sides over to specific issues: whether the Germans who committed Holocaust atrocities were “ordinary” or if they were “willing executioners.” Another key issue is the question as to whether a *Führerbefehl*, or Führer Order, existed: that is, a direct order, coming from Hitler, to murder the Jews. Historians disagree about its issuance and timing, implementation, directives, and, for some, whether it existed at all. Because these issues dominate the historiography, this analysis attempts to summarize and highlight particular points and relate them to Ohlendorf, asking important questions regarding improvised *Einsatzgruppen* killings, motivations, and intent. What I am looking for are places, and directives, where Ohlendorf, and the other *Einsatzgruppen* leaders, used improvisational tactics to conduct mass murder. They were not given a handbook as to how to murder *en masse*. There were general methods followed but Ohlendorf had to adapt to a variety of conditions, including changing local police forces, population numbers, location of the executions, etc. Shown in this section is how his *Einsatzgruppen* acted independently, without specific directives, regarding how genocide was carried out; especially Ohlendorf’s objection to the use of gas vans as an execution tool.

Ironically as an undergraduate, Goldhagen wrote a significant study of Ohlendorf’s life and more than a decade later penned *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, a

critically acclaimed, but also reviled, book.¹⁵ Goldhagen's work has been widely condemned by historians as ahistorical. One of his central ideas is that over centuries, Germany bred a specific kind of "eliminationist anti-Semitism" that eventually led to their willingness to participate in the Holocaust.¹⁶ Fitting an Ohlendorf-specific historiography into the existing general debate demonstrates how a participant in genocide committed crimes because of his careerist nature, dedication to National Socialist ideology, and how important was the loyalty of a Nazi *Alter Kämpfer*. Although he was unquestionably anti-Semitic, Ohlendorf's professional goal was not to become a direct perpetrator of genocide. But he became exactly that, and his privileged *Alter Kämpfer* status bound him to the party

¹⁵ Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans in the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

¹⁶ Please note that this is only one of Goldhagen's debatable arguments, as there are so many in his writings regarding his attempt to explain German hatred for the Jews in metaphysical terms, his Zionist sympathies, etc. There are numerous scholarly criticisms and reviews written about Goldhagen's *Willing Executioners*. Some of these are Yehuda Bauer, "On Perpetrators of the Holocaust and the Public Discourse," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 87, no. 3: 1997, 343-50, Christopher R. Browning, "Daniel Goldhagen's Willing Executioners," *History and Memory* 8, no. 1: 1996, 88-108, Bernard Rieger, "'Daniel in the Lion's Den?' The German Debate about Goldhagen's 'Hitler's Willing Executioners,'" *History Workshop Journal*, no. 43: 1997, 226-33, Robert Gellately, *"Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust"*, by Daniel J. Goldhagen," *The Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 1: 1997, 187-91, Henry Friedlander, *"Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust," German Studies Review* 19, no. 3: 1996, 578-80. Other examples of related works are Geoff Eley, ed., *The Goldhagen Effect: History, Memory, Nazism, and Facing the German Past* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), Norman G. Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina Bird, *A Nation On Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998, F. H. Littell, ed., *Hyping the Holocaust: Scholars Answer Goldhagen* (East Rockaway, NY: Cummings and Hathaway, Inc.) 1997, Dieter Pohl, *Die Holocaust- Forschung und Goldhagens Thesen* (Muenchen: Oldenbourg, 1997), and Norman Finkelstein, "Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's 'Crazy' Thesis: A Critique of *Hitler's Willing Executioners*," *New Left Republic*, 1997, 39-88. For examples of Goldhagen's response to criticism see www.goldhagen.com, "Das Versagen der Kritiker", *Die Zeit*, 2 August 1996, "Motives, Causes and Alibis: A Reply to My Critics, *The New Republic*, 215/26, December, 1996.

with loyalty. His reluctance to participate in the killings themselves demonstrates a commitment to what he thought was the correct version of National Socialist ideology: one where he should not have to be a killer to be a successful Nazi. Therefore, he was not born and bred an “eliminationist anti-Semite.” There is a difference.

Trying to build a foundation from which to study Ohlendorf’s life and career proves difficult as the source material available is barely adequate. If a historian can access all of the known surviving documents related to Ohlendorf professional and personal life, perhaps then every question can be answered. The resources accessed for the writing of this paper are nonetheless sufficient to draw particular conclusions about Ohlendorf’s general thoughts, ideas and perceptions of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. I will attempt to fill the gaps in the historiography on Ohlendorf in this thesis. Finally, looking at Ohlendorf and the general questions of the historiographical debates points to the need for more individual case-studies to add to the discussion of perpetrator motivations, lives, careers, and their individual roles in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust.

Historiography of Ohlendorf

Deficiencies in scholarship are seen in the literature concerning various phases of Ohlendorf’s career. Firstly, his early years in academia, when he earned a degree in jurisprudence, studied Fascism at the University of Pavia, and returned to the district court in Hildesheim where he was a practicing lawyer, are an underexplored area. This part of Ohlendorf’s career led him to Jens Jessen, Nazi

academic and future member of the resistance, and two separate university jobs, in which he lectured and devised policies regarding middle class economics.¹⁷ Little has been written about this early phase and if more primary source materials were available, they might be able to address significant issues concerning his criticism of Hitler's economic policies, his desire to create a National Socialist utopia, and how Fascism played a tremendous role in Ohlendorf's belief system. Unfortunately for Ohlendorf and the world, his career in academia was cut short.

The next phase of his life is in the RSHA, where he was head of AMT III (SD-Inland). Here he set out to "remold the SD into the organization he had thought he was joining; he almost singlehandedly built the SD into an efficient and comprehensive information gathering organization."¹⁸ He did exactly that, at the

¹⁷ Although there has not been much, at least not in English, written on the life of Jessen, there are some important facts compiled here and more will be addressed and cited later in this essay. Jens Peter Jessen was an academic, economist, professor of Political Science, and affiliated with both the Universities of Kiel and Berlin where he led Ohlendorf to attempt to create a national German institute for economics. Ohlendorf and her shared the same economic vision, beliefs in National Socialism and eventually parted ways because of Jessen's radical affiliation with the *Berlin Mittwochsgesellschaft* (or Wednesday Society) where intellectual opponents of the Reich would meet. Most of the 20 July Plot (or Operation Valkyrie) perpetrators and supporters were members of this club. Jessen also was the head of the economic section of the *Akademie für Deutsches Recht* (German Law) who was strongly associated with National Socialist ideology. As the war drew nearer, the Nazis acquired more power, and persecuted academics, Jessen became a fervent opponent of National Socialism and the Nazi Party. More on Jessen and his relationship with Ohlendorf is discussed in this chapter, but the majority is in the life and career section of this essay. For more on Jessen's economic affiliations see Keith Tribe, *Strategies of Economic Order: German Economic Discourse, 1750-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Gerald D. Feldman, *Allianz and the German Insurance Business, 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Also, this website is for the German Memorial Resistance Center and has a small biography of Jessen http://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/jens-jessen/?no_cache=1.

¹⁸ Daniel J. Goldhagen, "The 'Humanist' as a Mass Murderer: The Mind and Deeds of SS General Otto Ohlendorf," Unpublished Honors Thesis (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1982), 13.

behest of Himmler. Ohlendorf's "opinion reports" were designed to gather information on various aspects of German life and report back to the Reich to offer criticism and ways in which to fix problems in Germany, with particular care given to economics. This phase lasted, on and off, until June 1941, when he was transferred to the *Einsatzgruppen* because of alleged ideological feuds with Himmler and Heydrich.

The *Einsatzgruppen* phase has been recently explored by scholars of history, sociology, and the Holocaust. Ohlendorf's careerist nature led him to order and oversee the efficient extermination of 90,000 Jews and partisans. Although he claimed to have been forcibly transferred, stating many times at the trial that he disapproved of these actions, he met his task with the same brutal efficiency as in any other phase of his career. Most of the scholarship dealing with Ohlendorf and the *Einsatzgruppen* tries to answer the question as to how an academic, a man of intellect, could condone the murder of 90,000 innocent civilians.

After his year in the *Einsatzgruppen*, Ohlendorf returned to the RSHA and again excelled at his career. He was successful in creating economic plans for the phase after Nazi victory, was promoted several times, and finally asked to join the Dönitz cabinet in Flensburg.¹⁹ Here, he surrendered to the Allies, thinking he would

¹⁹ The Flensburg Government, led by Admiral Karl Dönitz, was to take over after the suicide of Hitler on April 30, 1945. Dönitz and other Nazis like Albert Speer and Wilhelm Keitel were appointed to positions in this newly formed cabinet. After the battle of Berlin, the cabinet members, and other high-ranking Nazi officials like Himmler and Ohlendorf, fled to Flensburg, Germany on the Danish border. This government only lasted three weeks until May 23, 1945. For more information on the Flensburg government see Albert Speer, *Spandau* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), Joe Julius, Heydecker and Johannes Leeb, *The Nuremberg Trial: A History of Nazi Germany as Revealed Through the Testimony at Nuremberg* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1975), Marlis G. Steinert, *23 days: The Final Collapse of Nazi Germany* (New

be given clemency because of his work in intelligence in the Reich. The information he provided to the British was enough to call a set of Nuremberg war crimes trials called the *Einsatzgruppen* case.

Clearly, the trial period has been the most studied of all the phases of Ohlendorf's life, leaving his professional successes to fade with history. The testimony Ohlendorf gave in captivity and at the trial serves as the most easily accessible and largest quantity of primary source documentation on Ohlendorf's life, imprisonment, and death. Throughout each phase of his career, the same drive and motivation is always present. Ultimately, his devotion to National Socialist principles led him to command mass murder. Ironically to him, these actions would lead to his own hanging. It is important to remain aware of the achievements and gaps in the historiography while seeking a better understanding of World War II, Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, how the Nazi party operated, the lack of uniformity in National Socialist ideology, the privileged position of *Alte Kämpfer*, the role of the *Einsatzgruppen* in the Holocaust, and Ohlendorf's contribution.

York: Walker, 1969), Marlis G. Steinert, "The Allied Decision to Arrest the Dönitz Government," *Historical Journal* (1988): 651-663, Walter Lüdde-Neurath, and Jurgen Rohwer, *Unconditional Surrender: A Memoir of the Last Days of the Third Reich and the Dönitz Administration*, (Annapolis: US Naval Institute Press, 2010), Joachim C. Fest, *Inside Hitler's Bunker: The Last Days of the Third Reich* (Basingstoke and Oxford: Pan Macmillan, 2005), James Sidney Lucas, "Last days of the Third Reich: The Collapse of Nazi Germany, May 1945," *Army* 37 (1987): 94-95, and Ian Kershaw, *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1944-1945* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2011).

Themes

There is little written about Ohlendorf's early life, aside from his affidavits and testimony. Some scholars have been able to piece together facts about Ohlendorf's upbringing and early party involvement but there is no monograph on his life. Hilary Earl's work on the *Einsatzgruppen* trials has produced some of the most comprehensive surveys of his life and work, with emphasis on the trial.²⁰ In her works she points out that his personality shaped the nature of the trial and that as key defendant, he revealed how Nazi ideology was manifested in the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen*. Her studies are significant and important in analyzing the motivations of war criminals and the ways that National Socialists framed their justification for conducting genocide. This thesis aligns with Earl's conclusions that

²⁰ Earl's most recent work is *The Nuremberg SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial, 1945-1958: Atrocity, Law and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) where she embarks on a lengthy analysis of this particular trial, the defendants, judgments and aftermath. This book is significant in relation to studies of the more well-known Nuremberg Trials, where the 24 defendants were all perpetrators, intellectuals, and Reich devotees. Earl has basically done the laborious task of accumulating and analyzing all aspects of this particular trial. Prior work Earl has done includes "Scales of Justice: History, Testimony and the *Einsatzgruppen* Trial," in Jeffry Dieffendorf, ed. *Lesson and Legacies VI, New Currents in Holocaust Research*, 325-351 (Evanston, ILL: Northwestern University Press, 2004), where she analyzes the validity of Ohlendorf's testimony. "Biographical Method and Historical Analysis: Explaining Perpetrators' 'Route to Crime' using War Crimes Documentation," in Simone Lässig and Volker Berghahn (eds.) *Biography Between Structure and Agency: Approaches to German History*, 162-181 (New York: Berghahn Books and Oxford University Press, 2008). Here she discusses how testimony reveals particular similarities in the character and personalities of the accused. "Confessions of Wrongdoing of How to Save Yourself from the Hangman? An Analysis of British and American Intelligence Reports of the Activities of Otto Ohlendorf, May-December 1945," in David Bankier, ed. *Secret intelligence and the Holocaust*, 301-326 (New York and Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and Enigma Books, 2006). Each piece that Earl has done provides more insight into Ohlendorf's actions, activity in the *Einsatzgruppen*, and through testimony and trial records, makes important connections about how Ohlendorf's Nazi ideology never waned from his early life to his death.

Ohlendorf's trial testimony provided important insights into his transformation from National Socialist ideologue to mass murderer and this reveals how the Nazis manipulated even the most intelligent Germans into "effective instruments" of genocidal policy.²¹

Dr. Leon Goldensohn's post-war interviews with Ohlendorf serve to fill in some gaps in his upbringing, National Socialist ideology, and anti-Semitic beliefs.²² He served as prison psychiatrist at Landsberg and used a gentle approach to try and understand the "pathology" of the Nazi war criminals and was interested in analyzing their "depravities."²³ Noting that the persons interviewed were either on trial, about to be, or had been already sentenced, Goldensohn attempted to coax Nazis like Ohlendorf to reveal character traits, details that he used to write character assessments. About Ohlendorf he made the general observation that "he tends to speak precisely, but his manner is of a man who is expected to be insulted at any moment and is being defensive about it."²⁴ He delved into Ohlendorf's upbringing, family, education, views on anti-Semitism, and religion. The importance of this work is that it is a biographical sketch of Ohlendorf, including his own words as analyzed from a psychological and moral standpoint.

²¹ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 66.

²² Robert Gellately, ed., *The Nuremberg Interviews: Conducted by Leon Goldensohn* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

²³ Gellately, ed., *Interviews*, introduction, xx-xxi.

²⁴ Goldensohn, *Interviews*, 386.

Another valuable work on Ohlendorf's early life is from an unpublished honors thesis written by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen.²⁵ Prior to his monumental study of perpetrator motivations, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, Goldhagen's thesis, "The 'Humanist,'" draws on significant trends in Ohlendorf life. He includes a biography, analysis of motivation and Nazi ideology, and Ohlendorf's *weltanschauung* (or world view). The evidence he utilized is the most noteworthy part of his paper, drawing on the interviews, private letters and documents provided by Ohlendorf's widow, Käthe Ohlendorf. In addition to archive research, Goldhagen's father Erich personally interviewed Mrs. Ohlendorf and acquired privileged primary source documentation, most of which were her husband's papers.²⁶ Daniel Goldhagen's thesis serves as a significant study on Ohlendorf's life, National Socialist philosophy, and anti-Semitic ideology.

Cited in the vast majority of works written about any phase in Ohlendorf's life and career is Heinz Höhne's *Order of Death's Head*.²⁷ Höhne, like Goldhagen's father, conducted interviews and acquired copies of personal documents, including private letters, from Mrs. Ohlendorf. He was a German historian specializing in the

²⁵ Daniel J. Goldhagen, "The 'Humanist' as a Mass Murderer: The Mind and Deeds of SS General Otto Ohlendorf," Unpublished Honors Thesis (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1982).

²⁶ Erich Goldhagen's correspondence with Mrs. Ohlendorf is documented in *Käthe Ohlendorf Letter to David Irving*, March, 30, 1979. *Institute für Zeitgeschichte München*, 25-2356-1. He was a Ukrainian Jewish Holocaust survivor and professor at Harvard University. Daniel Goldhagen's primary source work for the thesis is based from his father's privileged acquisition of primary materials, copied by Ohlendorf's widow.

²⁷ Heinz Höhne, *The Order of Death's Head: The Story of Hitler's S.S.*, trans. By Richard Barry (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1970).

Schutzstaffel (SS), of which Ohlendorf was a member. His book analyzed not only trial documents, but also these personal documents and reveals that the SS was not an organization that ran with military precision. In fact, he discussed Ohlendorf's life and career in the SS as problematic, pointing out that his utopian visions of the party were "shattered" when he joined their ranks and that he concluded that their version of National Socialism was faulty.²⁸ Höhne was sympathetic to Ohlendorf, pointing out that at each phase of his Nazi career, he was constantly disappointed, especially in his feud with *SS-Reichsführer* Himmler. Höhne's work is frequently referenced in works on Nazi Germany and the Holocaust for analyzing people like Ohlendorf who, he argued, ended up buying into a flawed ideology.

There is a consensus in describing Ohlendorf as straightforward, contentious when questioned, careerist, professional, intellectual, and a Nazi ideologue. The common thread in all of the secondary literature on Ohlendorf is the question of how someone with apparent intellect became a mass murderer. This dissertation cannot definitively answer the question, but his intellectual prowess is beyond question. However, utilizing his loyalty and *Alter Kämpfer* status as a thread connecting all phases of his life and career brings a better understanding of why he participated in genocide. Further analyzing Ohlendorf's early life may shed more light on his anti-Semitic tendencies, elucidating whether he was a violently anti-Semitic from his upbringing as Goldhagen asserts. The scholarship has most recently turned to analyzing Ohlendorf in the context of his generation of Nazis.

²⁸ Höhne, *Death's Head*, 213.

In his early life, Ohlendorf was not self-grooming for a career in the Nazi government. Ohlendorf was an academic who studied Fascism in Italy and assumed important roles at the University of Kiel and in the establishment of the Center for Applied Economics in Berlin. He was associated with Dr. Jens Jessen, most known for his association with Operation Valkyrie, and together they attempted to create a National Center for Economics. There is little written about Ohlendorf as an academic and what has been done is basically chronicling his career, derived from his own statements in captivity. He was associated with economic theories that were not in line with Nazi economic policy. Earl touches upon this part of Ohlendorf's life, and Höhne mentioned how Jessen helped with Ohlendorf's academic career and induced him to join the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD).²⁹ However, there needs to be a major undertaking that analyzes Ohlendorf in the larger realm of academics in the early Third Reich. Much has been written about the persecution of academics and 1944 some of them plotted against the Reich in Operation Valkyrie.³⁰

²⁹ Höhne, *Death's Head*, 213-214.

³⁰ There are associations with academics, opposition to the Nazi party and involvement in Operation Valkyrie. In Nazi Germany, academics were often censored for speaking out against leaders and Nazi ideology. In some cases, traditional humanities and social sciences subjects were put to the wayside in favor of more pertinent subjects like eugenics and race hygiene. For more information on academics and Valkyrie see Pierre Galante, and Eugene Silianoff, *Operation Valkyrie: The German Generals' Plot Against Hitler* (New York and Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), John P. Crank, and Lee R. Rehm, "Reciprocity Between Organizations and Institutional Environments: a study of Operation Valkyrie," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 22, no. 5 (1994): 393-406, Robert Weldon Whalen, *Assassinating Hitler: Ethics and Resistance in Nazi Germany* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1993), Jo Fox, "Resistance and the Third Reich," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (2004): 271-283, Hans D. Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), Peter Hoffman, *History of the German Resistance, 1933-1945* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 1996), and Francis R. Nicosia, and Lawrence D.

In these works, nearly nothing is written of Ohlendorf, nor have his lectures or speeches while in academia been studied in any depth. Conceivably, if documents exist, they may reveal whether Ohlendorf was directly associated with any anti-Third Reich rhetoric.

Already written are a wealth of analyses concerning the economics of Nazi Germany. Götz Aly's *Hitler's Beneficiaries*, is an excellent study of how the Nazi economy was run. He argues that the Holocaust and the war together fueled the German economy through the war years.³¹ He delves into important connections between the *Volksgemeinschaft* ideology, Nazi philosophy and anti-Semitism, the economy and ultimately, the collapse of Nazi Germany. Aly's focus is on the Nazi campaign of theft. The Holocaust and German occupation of land, which provided money, slave labor, booty, and plunder of valuables and property through taxation. This increased German wealth and stimulated the German economy.

In addition, Adam Tooze's *Wages of Destruction* also offers insight into the Nazi economy by arguing that Germany made itself into an industrial power, only to be challenged by the United States during the war, and did so by involving large-scale corporations in the plan to invade the Soviet Union.³² Ironically, expanding the war into the Soviet Union for raw materials cost Germany the war, not because they

Stokes, eds., *Germans Against Nazism: Nonconformity, Opposition and Resistance in the Third Reich: Essay in Honour of Peter Hoffmann* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

³¹ Götz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War and the Nazi Welfare State* (New York: Holt Publishing, 2005).

³² Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2007).

were lacking in manpower, but because their lack of raw materials meant that they could not sustain the Eastern Front.³³ Germany underestimated the strength of Soviet resistance to their invasion and could not produce enough munitions to fight longer. Also, these two works critically analyze the role of corporations not only in Nazi economic policy, but in their philosophy of expansion, shedding new light onto a badly functioning Nazi government: one where corruption was rampant. In Tooze's estimation, racial policy was inseparable from the goals of World War II German aggression.

Ohlendorf, however, is scarcely written about as an economic functionary. Ludolf Herbst's *Der Totale Krieg und die Ordnung der Wirtschaft* (The Total War and Order of the Economy) offers a broad analysis of the war and Germany's post-war economic plans.³⁴ Included here is one of the few analyses that discussed Ohlendorf's economic plans, noting that he and Speer had major ideological differences concerning production and cooperation with big businesses. In addition, Herbst argued that the Nazis had no clear economic goal for the public could support.³⁵ In *Der Totale Krieg*, Herbst provided a brief analysis of Ohlendorf's life and analyzed his work on the political economy, something scarcely studied since. This work, along with Hanno Sowade's "Otto Ohlendorf: Non-Conformist," focused

³³ Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 429-432, 455, 460, 480, 486.

³⁴ Ludolf Herbst, *Der Totale Krieg und die Ordnung der Wirtschaft: Die Kriegswirtschaft im Spannungsfeld von Politik, Ideologie und Propaganda 1939-1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1982).

³⁵ Herbst, *Der Totale Krieg*, 13-15.

on Ohlendorf's criticism of the Nazi economy and his espousal, from early in his academic career, of a strategy of economic growth centered around small and medium-sized enterprises.³⁶

Hanno Sowade took much of Herbst's work on Ohlendorf and the economy and placed it in the context of his early academic efforts, arguing that Ohlendorf won the support of trade unions and the middle class by openly favoring the "lofty promises the regime had made to the middle class when it seized power," promises that the Nazi regime had reneged on.³⁷ According to Sowade, the primary beneficiaries of Nazi policies were war manufacturers like Daimler-Benz.³⁸ Ohlendorf continually criticized corporate self-interest and recommended reforming the distribution of consumer goods, thus promoting prosperity for the *Volksgemeinschaft* (people's community).³⁹ It was well-known to Ohlendorf that people like Hermann Göring were conspicuously profiting from rebuilding the

³⁶ Hanno Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf: Non-Conformist, SS Leader and Economic Functionary," in Ronald Smelser and Ranier Zitelman (eds.) *The Nazi Elite* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993) 155-164.

³⁷ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 157.

³⁸ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 157. For more information concerning the function of large-scale corporations like Daimler-Benz in the Nazi economy see Neil Gregor, *Daimler-Benz in the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), among many other books written about corporate economics in Nazi Germany.

³⁹ Christian Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy, Intellectuals in the SS War Machine* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 39, where Ingrao cites a conference paper from the *Bundesarchiv* Berlin, with lecture notes from Ohlendorf, 280 (n).

economy, reaping growing profits during the war, and taking bribes from certain corporations to increase their personal wealth.⁴⁰

Where the scholarship has most recently trended is in studying Ohlendorf's generation of Nazis. In addition to Goldhagen, Earl, and Höhne, Michael Wildt's *An Uncompromising Generation* details how Ohlendorf and his contemporaries in the RSHA were defined by the Great War: they lived through defeat, humiliation, Weimar, and post-war economic ruin. Thus, the time period of his upbringing defined his career and willingness to submit to a Nazi belief system.⁴¹ Germany's circumstances bred a culture of vengeance intent on overthrowing the Treaty of Versailles. Ohlendorf and his contemporaries joined the party and found positions in the Nazi government in order to be a direct part of policymaking and change for Germany. Wildt's *Generation* shows an important comprehensive approach to studying Ohlendorf as part of a whole group of like-minded Nazi intellectuals. Rather than attempting to point to Ohlendorf as a singular agent of Nazi crimes, analyzing the environment in which he and his contemporaries were raised and their belief system demonstrates how Nazi culture, ideology and practice were fueled by Germany's defeat in the Great War.

⁴⁰ For more on Göring's role in legitimizing the Nazi economy, and the establishment of the Göring see Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944: The Classic Analysis of the Nazi State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942 and 1944). Hermann Göring works was established to fill a stop-gap in production where it mined ore, coked it and worked the product into steel. Neumann argued that this became a "gangster organization" and tried to create a monopoly in producing war materials, 299-302.

⁴¹ Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

Like Wildt, Christian Ingrao's *Believe and Destroy* gives more of an in-depth analysis of the generational challenges facing Ohlendorf, and the *Einsatzgruppen* leaders, studying eighty German educated people who mostly ended up serving in the Reich and became perpetrators in the Holocaust.⁴² Similar to Wildt, Ingrao reinterprets the motivations of the *Einsatzgruppen* in light of how men like Ohlendorf were raised, educated, and their career paths, saying he has "tried to understand how these men came to *believe* [sic], and how their beliefs led them to *destroy* [sic]." ⁴³ He and Wildt, together, provide analytical data that shows most of the SS, SD, RSHA, and *Einsatzgruppen* leaders were somehow molded into perpetrators of the Holocaust by so deeply believing in Nazi ideology. Ingrao's book shows that Nazi activism was a result of the conditions under which Ohlendorf, and others, were raised and educated, and argues that this activism gave the perpetrators of the Holocaust a "soothing system of beliefs."⁴⁴ Where Ingrao goes beyond Wildt's analytical scope is in part three of his book. He critically analyzes justifications for war and genocide by tying together Ohlendorf's National Socialist ideology and how that manifested in the murder of 90,000 people. This thesis attempts to contextualize some of the same major themes undertaken by Ingrao and Wildt and apply them, in a larger scope, to Ohlendorf's life, career, and belief system.

⁴² Christian Ingrao, introduction.

⁴³ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, ix.

⁴⁴ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, viii-ix.

Arthur L. Smith explored another under-researched aspect of Ohlendorf's life: the *Meldungen* (public opinion reports).⁴⁵ A major part of Ohlendorf's career in the SD, then in the RSHA, was to collect intelligence reports and conduct public opinion polls on a variety of issues in Germany. The *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, as they are called, were carefully conducted surveys of regular German people's opinions on propaganda, economics, war, newspapers, general sentiments, and a myriad of other aspects of everyday life in Germany.⁴⁶ These reports were created by Ohlendorf, with a hand-picked, large staff. Data was collected by informants, who had Reich security clearances, and statistics were compiled and sent to Ohlendorf's superior, namely Himmler. Smith argued that these reports contained important information vital to the survival of the Reich. Often, Ohlendorf was chastised because the reports were negative and criticized many aspects of Hitler and the Reich. Ohlendorf's reputation for thorough and honest work upset Himmler to the point where he refused to allow Hitler to see the reports and disbanded the *Meldungen* completely by 20 July 1944, the day of Operation Valkyrie.⁴⁷ There is certainly a need for more study to be conducted on the impact and results of Ohlendorf's reports.

⁴⁵ Arthur L. Smith, "Life in Wartime Germany: Colonel Ohlendorf's Opinion Service," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Spring, 1972): 7-23.

⁴⁶ Heinz Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich* (Munich: Taschenbuch Verlag, 1968).

⁴⁷ Much more on the reports and Smith's study is offered in the early life and career section of this essay.

Ohlendorf's time with the *Einsatzgruppen* has been widely studied, but mostly in general terms. Richard Rhodes's *Masters of Death* is an excellent study of the development and function of the *Einsatzgruppen* and how they were generally made up of "ordinary" Germans who enacted mass murder.⁴⁸ By "ordinary," Rhodes does not mean average citizens forced to participate in murder, but rather recruits whose occupational and economic background was "ordinary," rather than that of trained, highly specialized killers. He argues that local groups were instrumental in exterminating the Jews and that the genocidal actions on the Eastern Front facilitated the creation of extermination camps.⁴⁹ Another book significant to the study of Ohlendorf in the *Einsatzgruppen* is the *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, or Operational Situational Reports, USSR.⁵⁰ These reports were dispatched from the *Einsatzgruppen* back to Berlin with details concerning the date, place, division, number of people executed with a breakdown according to gender, race, religion, ethnicity, and sometimes age. Compiled in this work are not only statistics from Ohlendorf's *Einsatzgruppen* (and the other divisions as well), but the editors offer commentary on discrepancies and accuracy of figures reported. These reports were the basis for the *Einsatzgruppen* trial.

⁴⁸ Richard Rhodes, *Masters of Death: The SS-Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

⁴⁹ Rhodes, *Masters of Death*, forward.

⁵⁰ Yitzhak Arad, Shmuel Krakowski, and Shmuel Spector, eds. *The Einsatzgruppen Reports: Selections from the Dispatches of the Nazi Death Squads' Campaign Against the Jews in Occupied Territories of the Soviet Union July 1941-January 1943* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989).

In addition to Ingrao, Höhne, and Earl's extensive work on piecing together Ohlendorf's life in general, there are significant sections of their books that focus on Ohlendorf's role in carrying out the executions. A recurring theme in these studies concerns the issue of Ohlendorf's transfer. According to his Nuremberg testimony, he twice refused to be transferred to the front but capitulated because of personal pressure from Heydrich and Himmler. Also addressed are issues concerning the process by which an educated person like Ohlendorf became a mass murderer. Wildt and Ingrao analyze this extensively, discussing the culture of Nazi activism in Ohlendorf's generation of Nazi officials.

There are numerous volumes and articles written about the *Einsatzgruppen*, too many to mention them all, and others are specifically referred to in other sections of this dissertation. In addition to what has already been referenced, Roland Headland's *Messages of Murder* further addresses key issues with the reports in a significant study of the *Einsatzgruppen*.⁵¹ French MacLean's *The Field Men*, offers an excellent analysis of the *Einsatzgruppen* and demonstrates a thorough statistical analysis of the *Einsatzkommandos* and their work in the Soviet Union.⁵² Many different studies have shown novel analyses of perpetrators, directives, and the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen*. The only thing lacking is a complete biography of Ohlendorf.

⁵¹ Ronald Headland, *Messages of Murder: A Study of the Reports of the Einsatzgruppen, the Security Police, and the Security Service, 1941-1943* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1992).

⁵² French MacLean, *The Field Men: the SS Officers Who Led the Einsatzkommandos of the Nazi Mobile Killing Units* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer, 1999).

Andrej Angrick recently published the first work that examines, in its entirety and completely, the activities of *Einsatzgruppe D* and its leader, Otto Ohlendorf.⁵³ So far, his book stands alone as the foundational study of the Holocaust in the Ukraine and explores Ohlendorf's role in the indoctrination of his "soldiers," which centered on the proposition that the survival of Germany was dependent on the extermination of men, women, and children. Additionally, he argues that there was a communication breakdown between the *Einsatzgruppen* and the Reich and that most of the killings they performed were improvised. All of the work Angrick has painstakingly compiled is of the utmost significance to this study and future studies regarding perpetration, the Holocaust, Nazi policies and bureaucracy, and Ohlendorf.⁵⁴ His study reveals that "ordinary Germans" became perpetrators in the Holocaust through improvisational killings. This confirms what has been written about the atrocities committed in other *Einsatzgruppen*, for instance *Einsatzgruppe C*'s massacre at Babi Yar.⁵⁵

⁵³ Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941 – 1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003).

⁵⁴ Angrick has also written "Otto Ohlendorf und die SD-Tätigkeit der *Einsatzgruppe D*," in Michael Wildt (ed.) *Nachrichtendienst, politische Elite, Mordeinheit. Der Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers SS, 1941-1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003), and "Die *Einsatzgruppe D*. Struktur und Tätigkeiten einer mobile Einheit Der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD in der Deutsch besetzten Sowjetunion," 2 Volumes, unpublished dissertation (Berlin: Technical University of Berlin, 1999).

⁵⁵ For more information on *Einsatzgruppe C*, there are numerous books and articles written. In particular, see Jürgen Matthäus, "Controlled Escalation: Himmler's Men in the Summer of 1941 and the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Territories," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 218-242, Yaacov Lozowick, "Rollbahn Mord: The Early Activities of *Einsatzgruppe C*," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 2, no. 2 (1987): 221-241, and Helmut Langerbein, *Hitler's Death Squads: The Logic of Mass Murder* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press) 2004.

The historiography of Ohlendorf and the trial is almost as extensive as the work done on the *Einsatzgruppen's* reign of terror. Telford Taylor, Chief prosecutor at the first set of Nuremberg trials, Benjamin Ferencz, Chief prosecutor at the *Einsatzgruppen* Trial, and Chief Justice of the *Einsatzgruppen* Trial, Michael Musmanno, have all written excellent analyses of trial procedures, defense strategies, contemporary issues in law and justice, and about the character of Ohlendorf.⁵⁶ Much of the literature trends with Earl who, in her analysis of the Ohlendorf case, has reevaluated the procedures and process of the trial and conviction of the *Einsatzgruppen* perpetrators, finding that this trial was both too reliant on Ohlendorf's so-called "truth telling" and on the political climate of the Cold War. Earl addresses important questions relating to U.S.- German relations in the post-war era, with particular emphasis on how the impending Cold War impacted the outcome of the trials. She analyzes how sentences were carried out, commuted, overturned, and how some of the convicted were altogether freed of responsibility because there was a strong German contingent in society who backed the perpetrators. Thus, the American captors and adjutants were pressured into both being lenient and strict with their punishment. Part of the legacy of

⁵⁶ Ferencz, at this time 96 years old, still lectures on the *Einsatzgruppen* case, war crimes, and his recollections of his perception of Ohlendorf, and their one-time meeting. There are so many memoirs and analyses of the entirety of the Nuremberg Trials, too many to mention here. In addition to Earl's already mentioned work on the *Einsatzgruppen* case, Michael R. Marrus, John Mendelsohn, Whitney Harris, Telford Taylor, and Michael Musmanno have all contributed significant analyses of procedure, perception, truth-finding, defining war crimes and character analyses of the defendants. In particular, see Telford Taylor, *Anatomy of the Nuremberg Trials: A Personal Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992) and Michael A. Musmanno, *The Eichmann Kommandos* (Philadelphia: McRae Smith Publishing, 1961), coiner of the Ohlendorf as "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" phrase.

Nuremberg is that it imposed death sentences on men like Ohlendorf to set an historical precedent for the illegality of genocide. Finally, she discusses a major tension between history and law. Chief Justice Musmanno sought to gain “truth” in history from the trial, over which he presided. The organizers and planners of the *Einsatzgruppen* trial named “historical truth” as a specific goal of the entire trial, a fact Earl unabashedly rejects.⁵⁷ Finding out the “truth” from reports can be successful, but coupled with the biased testimony of condemned men ready to lie to preserve their lives is questionable.

As demonstrated above, there also needs to be more analysis of how Ohlendorf served as an economic functionary. He fought for middle class oriented economics, against the corporate will of the Reich (where big businesses hugely profited from the Nazi regime while the middle class was cast aside), and more attention should be paid to his policy proposals. Maybe this gap exists because the documents are either gone or unobtainable. A better understanding of Ohlendorf’s economic theories will show a greater continuity in his life and career and will help provide a clearer definition of his personal National Socialist ideology.

Although there are studies of academia and academics during the Nazi era, they tend to focus on subversion of policy or, in the case of Jessen, how the Reich was met with intellectual resistance. Dissociating Ohlendorf from his crimes is impossible, and would be inexcusable. However, notwithstanding his time in the *Einsatzgruppen*, his career was based on challenging what he thought were corrupt acts and institutions in Germany. In his own mind, he certainly was an activist, and

⁵⁷ Earl, “Scales of Justice,” 3.

so were his generation of Nazi officials. His connection to activism, especially to Jessen and other academics, is an area of Ohlendorf's life that needs further research. Piecing together a biography of Ohlendorf may help address some of the gaps and issues in the historiography. The next section examines the so-called intentionalist/functionalist debate, which looks at the actions of perpetrators like Ohlendorf, in part, in terms of the existence, or lack thereof, of the Führer's extermination order.

The Intentionalist/Functionalist Debate

In the 1980s, the historiography of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust changed as the focus shifted to whether or not there was a predetermined order or plan to murder the Jews of Europe. The intentionalist viewpoint asserts that Hitler planned the Holocaust while the bureaucracy carried it out. In Ohlendorf's Nuremberg testimony, he claimed to be a mere functionary of Hitler, who led *Einsatzgruppe D* in exterminating Jews and partisans, located at the extreme end of the southern front in Ukraine and Crimea. All of this fell under the purview of a specific Hitler order. However, many historians have maintained that the Holocaust unfolded out of conditions on the ground. This would mean that leaders such as Ohlendorf did not just carry out policies, but in fact designed them.

At the *Einsatzgruppen* Trials, prosecutor Colonel John Amen asked Ohlendorf "in what respects, if any, were the official duties of the Einsatz groups concerned with Jews and Communist commissars?" Ohlendorf replied "the instructions were that in the Russian operational areas of the *Einsatzgruppen* the Jews, as well as the

Soviet political commissars, were to be liquidated.”⁵⁸ Questioned by the prosecutor, Ohlendorf asserted that the liquidation order came from Hitler, who gave the order to Himmler to put in place, although it is known Ohlendorf falsified this fact.

However, he also asserted that the eleventh Army was not made aware of the details of the liquidation orders. If the Wehrmacht was not aware of how the mobile killing units operated, despite the attachment of *Einsatzgruppe D* to the Eleventh Army, then this demonstrates a communication breakdown. Either there was a disjointed formal plan for killing the Jews, one side blatantly lied, or both sides were misled. But, if there was a communication breakdown and the plan for killing was disjointed, this could also mean the initiative went over to forces on the ground. This could mean that the Holocaust was the result of a cultural consensus.

In the 1990s, historians were practically forced to publicly confirm or deny the thesis that the Holocaust was solely the product of Hitler’s will, and to answer the question as to whether there were other factors contributing to the implementation and success of the Holocaust. Predating the debate, historian Tim Mason, who coined the terms intentionalist and functionalist, warned other scholars of the responsibility of every historian to report as objectively as possible on the Holocaust.⁵⁹ Mason cautioned historians against leaning to a particular side in the Holocaust debate. However, his words were ignored.

⁵⁸ Mendelsohn, *WCT*, 3 January, 1946.

⁵⁹ Tim Mason, “Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy About the Interpretation of National Socialism” in *Der Führerstaat: Mythos und Realität – Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reiches*, eds. Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 68.

In “Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism”, Mason rejected previous works that over-emphasized Hitler’s role in the Holocaust with little importance given to the functionality of the collective Germany and individual Germans. Although his argument was functionalist, he was successful in objectively outlining analytical flaws on both sides of the historical analysis. He pointed out that intentionalists view functionalism as apologetic to National Socialism. Mason further asserted that a major pitfall of the intentionalist position is that they concentrated too much on individual capacity for “evil” and murder, rather than how the bureaucracy and the public perpetuated the Holocaust. His disdain for bias is clear when he declares “if historians do have a public responsibility, if hating is part of their method and warning part of their task, it is necessary that they should hate precisely.”⁶⁰ Despite Mason’s words of warning, Goldhagen began another important historiographical debate.

In 1996, Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* began the debate over how to appropriately study the perpetration of the Holocaust.⁶¹ Among many significant theories in his book, the core of his argument centers on a historically ingrained “eliminationist anti-Semitism” that motivated ordinary German enlistees to willingly commit mass murder.⁶² He attempts to

⁶⁰ Mason, “Intention,” 70.

⁶¹ Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, forward.

⁶² Goldhagen, *Willing Executioners*, 23-24.

dispel what he calls “myths” including that the German people were unaware of the Holocaust as it happened but argues that regular Germans willingly participated in mass murder.⁶³ Most importantly, Goldhagen argues that the Nazi brand of anti-Semitism is unique in world history because German culture inculcated Germans with a commitment to genocide. He not only subscribes to an intentionalist perspective that views the Holocaust as formally planned, but stakes out an extreme intentional viewpoint according to which all of Germany was anti-Semitic, leading to their mobilization and participation in the Holocaust. According to Goldhagen, “the German perpetrators, namely those who themselves killed Jews or helped to kill them, willingly did so because they shared a Hitlerian view of Jews, and therefore believed the extermination to be just and necessary.”⁶⁴

For Goldhagen, Nazis leaders like Ohlendorf were all part of the grand eliminationist anti-Semitic ideological scheme. When Ohlendorf was in Landsberg prison, Dr. Leon Goldensohn, an American physician and psychiatrist, asked Ohlendorf about his assignment to the *Einsatzgruppen*. He spoke of the liquidation orders not in terms of anti-Semitism but “rather the Jews in Russia were said to be the main carrier of Bolshevism there. It was against my will that I was ordered to an *Einsatzgruppe* in Russia.”⁶⁵ However, his alleged unwillingness to be on the Eastern Front, at all, is expressed here. This is contrary to Goldhagen’s intentionalist

⁶³ Goldhagen, *Willing Executioners*, 10.

⁶⁴ Daniel J. Goldhagen, “Presentation on *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*” (Symposium, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C., April 8, 1996).

⁶⁵ Ohlendorf in Goldensohn’s *Interviews*, 389.

scheme. But Goldhagen points out that Ohlendorf, an intellectual and “an unusually decent man, even...an idealist within the Nazi movement...believed in its vision of a harmonious utopia.”⁶⁶ In the next few sentences he argues that Ohlendorf was ultimately one of the “demonological” visionaries who accepted genocide as the solution to the Jewish problem.⁶⁷ This is the epitome of the Jekyll and Hyde caricature that Judge Michael Musmanno painted of Ohlendorf, although calling Ohlendorf a “demonological visionary” is problematic and assumptive.⁶⁸ Goldhagen raises useful questions, but does not take into account the individualistic and impromptu nature of mass murder. At least, not in the Ohlendorf case. He was not an eliminationist anti-Semite, born into a several centuries old culture of pent-up hatred for the Jews that culminated in his willingness to enact mass murder. The truth is, Ohlendorf was an anti-Semite, National Socialist ideologue, and proponent of the genocide. But Musmanno’s reference to Jekyll and Hyde characterized Ohlendorf from a superficial standpoint. Further analysis does not reveal two entirely different Ohlendorfs: there was only one with a consistent dedication to Nazi ideology.

Radical intentionalist views are not alone relegated to Goldhagen. Holocaust historian Lucy Dawidowicz argued that the origins of the Holocaust must be traced back to November 11, 1918, the exact time when the Great War ended. According to

⁶⁶ Goldhagen, *Willing Executioners*, 394.

⁶⁷ Goldhagen, *Willing Executioners*, 393-394.

⁶⁸ Michael A. Musmanno, Judgment, April 8, 1948, NARA, M-895, *Einsatzgruppen* Trial Transcript, Roll 7, 132.

Dawidowicz, this was the precise moment the Holocaust was born into Adolf Hitler's mind.⁶⁹ Her controversial arguments stem from the standpoint that there is no connection between perpetrator and victim in the Holocaust. In reality, there is a connection between the "ordinary" perpetration and victimization where, for instance, the local authorities were responsible for rounding up and at least helping execute the Jews of their hometowns. For her, the master plan of the Holocaust was Hitler's alone, and those who enacted the anti-Semitic policies bought into Nazi indoctrination. She also believed that functionalists, who did not trace the origins of the Holocaust in the same way, were guilty of ignoring their responsibility to historical truth.⁷⁰ Although her thesis was significant at the time of its publication, her viewpoint has now been dissolved into a larger argument that includes more dimensions to historical studies.

Published in 1992, Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men* is based on courtroom testimony of survivors who perpetrated the atrocities of Reserve Police Battalion 101 in Poland.⁷¹ Browning argues these were "ordinary" Germans, from all levels of society, who were thrust into a brutal war and forced to partake in mass murder. His conclusions, based on the Milgram experiments, emphasized that the soldiers who actually committed the atrocities did so out of peer pressure more

⁶⁹ Lucy Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and The Historians* (Cambridge, Massachusetts.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 146.

⁷⁰ Dawidowicz, *Holocaust and Historians*, 146.

⁷¹ Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins Publishing, Inc., 1992).

than any anti-Semitic bloodlust.⁷² In Browning's argument, he stated "according to Goldhagen, one question historians like myself should not pose and need not answer is how ordinary Germans overcame reluctance and inhibition to become professional killers."⁷³ Browning does recognize that some of the perpetrators performed their tasks with "gusto" but doubts that the average soldier or conscript volunteered for service to murder based on the deep-seeded "lethal and demonological anti-Semitism" Goldhagen describes.⁷⁴ His views on functionalism are moderate and he does not dismiss the role of Hitler in the Holocaust but, rather, offers an explanation based on a combination of ideology and governmental structure, which allowed atrocities to be committed on such a vast scale.

As Raul Hilberg declared, "ordinary men were to perform extraordinary tasks."⁷⁵ But countering Goldhagen's definition of "ordinary" and bolstering Browning's definition of "ordinary", John P. Sabini and Maury Silver point out that if the so-called willing executioners were interchangeable machine-like perpetrators who were driven to kill by an intense anti-Semitic cause, then why did the nature of murder change? In "Destroying the Innocent with a Clear Conscience: A Sociopsychology of the Holocaust", they describe the evolution of camps and murder

⁷² Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 171-176.

⁷³ Christopher Browning, "Daniel Goldhagen's *Willing Executioners*" (Symposium, *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, Washington, D.C., April 8, 1996). Provide the URL!

⁷⁴ Goldhagen, *Willing Executioners*, 392-393.

⁷⁵ Raul Hilberg, "The Nature of the Process", in *Survivors, Victims and Perpetrators: Essay on the Nazi Holocaust*, ed. Joel E. Dimsdale (Washington and New York: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, 1980), 5.

to include things like gas chambers and vans.⁷⁶ These tools of execution distanced the executioner from the killings due to “...psychological limitation of even the best trained and best selected SS men, the most rabid anti-Semites...”⁷⁷ In Ohlendorf’s testimony at Nuremberg, he repeatedly claimed that his soldiers were suffering from battle fatigue and was concerned for the emotional strain that execution-style killings has on perpetrator and victim alike. So, he initially embraced the gas vans, to lessen the burden of mass murder on his soldiers. When questioned of their utility at Nuremberg, Ohlendorf responded:

On the one hand, the aim was that the individual leaders and men should be able to carry out the executions in a military manner acting on orders and should not have to make a decision of their own; it was, to all intents and purposes, an order which they were to carry out. On the other hand, it was known to me that through the emotional excitement of the executions ill treatment could not be avoided, since the victims discovered too soon that they were to be executed and could not therefore endure prolonged nervous strain. And it seemed intolerable to me that individual leaders and men should in consequence be forced to kill a large number of people on their own decision.⁷⁸

The creation of gas vans demonstrates how the use of improvisation on the battlefield was necessary to carry out the mass killings. It also shows that “ordinary” German soldiers may not have been fervent enough in their anti-Semitic beliefs to handle the pressure of execution-style killings. The fact that Ohlendorf was able to make a judgment call indicates he had a degree of independent ability with how *Einsatzgruppe D* carried out mass murder.

⁷⁶ John P. Sabini and Maury Silver, “Destroying the Innocent with a Clear Conscience: Sociopsychology of the Holocaust”, in *Survivors, Victims, and Perpetrators: Essay on the Nazi Holocaust*, ed. Joel E. Dimsdale (Washington and New York: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation, 1980), 345.

⁷⁷ Sabini and Silver, “Destroying the Innocent,” 345.

⁷⁸ John Mendelsohn, *WCT*, 3 January, 1946.

A discussion of functionalist theory is not possible without referring to Hans Mommsen. In *From Weimar to Auschwitz*, he stressed the so-called machine of government in implementing the Holocaust, meaning that the economy, manufacturing, the military, and all parts of the government cooperated in implementing one particular initiative. But there was a shift in power structure when the end of the war became inevitable. Initiatives and directives were less centralized.⁷⁹ In other words, although there was a central government in Germany, much of how the Holocaust and the war was carried out, was not determined by the central government, but by the *Einsatzgruppen*, the Wehrmacht, and the provisional occupied government officials. He developed a concept of “deliberate dictatorial will,” meaning that the Führer consistently supported and called for enacting the Final Solution.⁸⁰ Mommsen argued, however, that ‘will’ was not enough to implement such a grandiose, murderous policy. For Mommsen, Auschwitz is not only symbolic of “inconceivable crimes” but also represents the “destruction of politics” in the Nazi regime.⁸¹ Perhaps most importantly, he disputed the idea of Hitler having built a totalitarian regime, referring to him as a “weak dictator.” “Hitler’s role as a driving force, which with the same inner compulsion drove on to

⁷⁹ Hans Mommsen, *From Weimar to Auschwitz: Essay in German History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 15-20.

⁸⁰ Tim Mason, *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 19. See also, Hans Mommsen, *Beamtentum im Dritten Reich*, (Stuttgart, 1966), and Martin Broszat, *Soziale Motivation und Führer-Bindung des Nationalsozialismus*; Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, Vol. 18, No. 4 (1970) pp. 329-65.

⁸¹ Mommsen, *Weimar to Auschwitz*, 16.

self-destruction should not be underestimated.”⁸² Noteworthy here is that Mommsen does not dismiss Hitler’s role in promoting or creating the ideology of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, but he argues that the Holocaust was not implemented by Hitler through the totalitarian system.

Concerning Mommsen’s ‘weak dictator’ claim, Ian Kershaw states that “it must be recognized that the Dictator was only the extreme exponent of a chain of anti-humanitarian impulses set free by the lapse of all institutional, legal, and moral barriers, and once set in motion, regenerating themselves in magnified form.”⁸³ In agreement with Kershaw’s viewpoint about the culpability of Hitler, Mommsen’s thesis of the “weak dictator” underlines the importance of studying people like Ohlendorf.⁸⁴ Without people like Ohlendorf to implement and carry out Hitler’s murderous policies, the Holocaust might not have been so successful.

Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat co-created the structuralist viewpoint, according to which internal rivalries, not the Hitler initiative, unleashed the Holocaust. In *Der Staat Hitler*, Broszat examines how the Nazi regime was plagued with power struggles between itself and the traditional German state.⁸⁵ This friction fueled the duality Germany faced and instead of the Third Reich being a totalitarian

⁸² Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000), 77.

⁸³ Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 77-78.

⁸⁴ Mommsen, *Weimar to Auschwitz*, 98.

⁸⁵ Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State: The Foundation and Development of the Internal Structure of the Third Reich* (London and New York: Longman Publishers, 1981).

regime, it was indeed polycratic, meaning that Nazi Germany was governed by many contradictory forces, rather than just run by Hitler. Broszat argued that irreparable fissures in the years after the Versailles Treaty, seen in discontent with Weimar and an economic depression, led the Nazis to radicalize, and Weimar and its supporters retaliated, creating an environment of violence. Written as a reaction to Holocaust denier David Irving's *Hitler's War*, Broszat dismissed Irving's insistence that Hitler was unaware of the Holocaust, a thesis based on the lack of a written order.⁸⁶ In "Hitler and the Genesis of the Final Solution", Broszat argued that Hitler provided the basic ideological principles behind the Holocaust through the concept *Lebensraum*, the expanded living space required to repopulate the pure Aryan race.⁸⁷ Hitler ordered the deportation, and later extermination, of Jews but gave no real plan as to how this would be accomplished. As the Eastern Front expanded, Broszat suggests that the *Einsatzgruppen* liquidations became "a way out of the blind alley into which the Nazis had manoeuvred [sic] themselves".⁸⁸ Without functionary perpetrators, such as Ohlendorf, Hitler's obsession with *Lebensraum* and the Jews would have remained just that: an ideology.

A more recent contributor to functionalist thought is Götz Aly, historian of economics and the Nazi Germany. His arguments are a bottom-up viewpoint on the

⁸⁶ Martin Broszat, "Hitler and the Genesis of the 'Final Solution': An Assessment of David Irving's Theses" in *Aspects of the Third Reich* edited by H.W. Koch (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985), 419-420.

⁸⁷ Broszat, "Hitler and the Genesis," 400.

⁸⁸ Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 47.

evolution of the Holocaust, wherein he views Hitler as a vague figurehead in the overall construction, means, and actions of Holocaust perpetrators. Aly's focus is on Poland but describes how the soldiers themselves, along with their superiors, were the driving force behind extermination. In *Final Solution: Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews*, Aly argues that the RSHA, Gauleiters and other lower-level officials were constantly trying to amend policies based on economics, the desire to relocate non-Aryans, and the quest for *Lebensraum*, rather than a purist anti-Semitic ideology.⁸⁹ Critics condemn Aly for not paying enough attention to anti-Jewish beliefs. For Aly, however, the eternal quest for *Lebensraum* was what drove the ethnic cleansings of Eastern Europe. While Goldhagen and Dawidowicz emphasize anti-Semitism as the driving force behind the Holocaust, Aly's bottom-up approach places this ideology second.

In *Hitler's Beneficiaries*, Aly argues that German financial policy was shaped firstly by *Lebensraum* and then by the enormous financial acquisitions inherited from the Reich, which basically cleaned out Eastern Europe.⁹⁰ Never denying fervent anti-Semitic beliefs which existed as a motivation for plunder, Aly asserts that the war fattened the German economy in such a way that the majority of Germans would benefit. And they did.⁹¹ Because of the acquisition of money, from plunder, Germany saw an extremely fast accumulation of wealth. Over-inflation was

⁸⁹ Götz Aly, *Final Solution: Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁹⁰ Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries*.

⁹¹ Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries*, 302-303.

the result of the expedient incorporation of wealth back into the German economy. Germans did benefit from the war and the Holocaust. Aly's book represents new ways in which to analyze the intent and perpetration of the Holocaust.

The previously held view was that the Wannsee Conference was when the Final Solution was implemented. This view is now historically discredited but historian Robert Gerwath asserted that Wannsee marked where the plan to systematically exterminate the Jews became Reich policy.⁹² The meeting, led by Reinhard Heydrich, agreed on a plan to execute Hitler's implicit orders for the extermination of all Jews as partisans. There was intent for genocide shown early in the Nazi years with Hitler's speeches and progressive restrictions on Jews. The highest Nazi officials attributed the Final Solution to Hitler. However, without a series of functionaries believing in the cause enough to perpetrate the Holocaust, it could not have occurred. In *Messages of Murder*, Ronald Headland suggests that the extermination process began slowly.⁹³ This was not because of a lack of knowledge, but because of resource scarcity during the Second World War. He saw the capability of the *Einsatzgruppen* as directly proportionate to their manpower.⁹⁴ Although the group was established in 1939 to kill political partisans in eastern occupied territories, by the time Ohlendorf took command of *Einsatzgruppe D*, manpower had dramatically increased. Prior to the official implementation of the

⁹² Robert Gerwath, *Hitler's Hangman: The Life of Heydrich* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).

⁹³ Headland, *Messages of Murder*, 402.

⁹⁴ Headland, *Messages of Murder*, 402, 407.

Final Solution after Wannsee, Operation Barbarossa demanded the reallocation of enormous amounts of supplies and soldiers to the eastern front. To combat the Wehrmacht's increased mobilization on the Eastern Front, the *Einsatzgruppen* were given more directives, and indiscriminate killings of partisans were committed *en masse*.

How can surviving documents help to sort out the intentionalist/functionalist debate? Despite the escalation of *Einsatzgruppen* force power in the east and according to the testimony from most *Einsatzgruppen* Trial defendants, Heydrich and Himmler gave a certain degree of discreet power to the leaders of the mobile killing units. Headland argued that the most significant period for the *Einsatzgruppen* was between March and June 1941 which was "a direct reflection of Hitler's determination to ensure that the upcoming conflict would be an ideological war of total destruction."⁹⁵ However, in the Operational Situational Reports, detailed reports of *Einsatzgruppen* activities reported back to the Reich, there was no specific directive on how to universally deal with Jews and partisans in the east. The surviving OSRs are correspondences from the *Einsatzgruppen* to Berlin, not vice versa.

The reports usually stated casualties by region and ethnicity and have some sort of justification for the 'liquidation' of huge numbers of people. For example, Operational Situational Report USSR No. 45 from *Einsatzgruppe D*, *Einsatzkommando 11a* stated "up to this point 551 Jews have been liquidated, of

⁹⁵ Headland, *Messages of Murder*, 402-403.

these 151 for participating in sabotage acts, 400 in reprisal for shooting at German medical trucks and for lighting signal flares for Red aviators.”⁹⁶ However, there was no specific instruction given to the *Einsatzgruppen* as to how the atrocities were to be committed, yet Heydrich and Himmler demanded reports back with the utmost accuracy of detail and causation. The *Einsatzgruppen* acted in indiscriminate ways, independent from specific Reich orders. This shows that although there was certainly a top-down “eliminationist anti-Semitism” in Nazi ideology, a functionalist view better suits how the *Einsatzgruppen* actually functioned.

Ohlendorf’s transfer from RSHA AMT III to the *Einsatzgruppen* was allegedly due to personal conflict with Himmler and insubordination, and at Nuremberg, Ohlendorf maintained he had no other choice. It is unclear whether he put up any resistance, was threatened, or simply willing to go because he was an *Alter Kämpfer*. What can be determined from this is that if he felt begrudged for being sent to the front, it may only have been because he either did not want to be away from his family, or he knew the guilt of directly participating in genocide could haunt him. However, he went to the front and because he was a careerist and *Alter Kämpfer*, his career was filled with promotions, awards and accolades thereafter. His testimony faulted Himmler and Hitler for having the Final Solution as their master plan, and he claimed that he, enacting this plan under orders, was merely a soldier following orders. Although Ohlendorf is not specifically mentioned, in *Interrogations: The Nazi Elite in Allied Hands*, Richard Overy asserted that the Nuremberg defendants

⁹⁶ Arad, Krakowski and Spector, (eds.), *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, 75.

were wrong to assume Hitler's orders were intended to exterminate all of the Jews.⁹⁷ Yet, reprimands were not given for carrying out more killings than originally intended. When testifying, Ohlendorf distinguished between motivation for murder and actually committing the murders. Constantly referring to himself as a soldier, he described how he led the *Einsatzgruppe* and led the murder of 90,000 people but claimed the responsibility should lie with Hitler.⁹⁸ He acted on orders from Hitler and Himmler and ultimately the fault was theirs, he asserted.

Like other defendants, Ohlendorf continued to testify that there was intent and an original liquidation order that came from Hitler, enforced by Himmler. When the prosecution asked about the order, Ohlendorf responded by recounting his conversation with Himmler in late summer 1941 at Nikolaev, Ukraine: "He assembled the leaders and men of the Einsatzkommandos, repeated to them the liquidation order, and pointed out that the leaders and men who were taking part in the liquidation bore no personal responsibility for the execution of this order. The responsibility was his, alone, and the Fuehrer's."⁹⁹ Culpability for these atrocities ultimately lay with Ohlendorf despite his and other defendants' attempts to distance

⁹⁷ Richard Overy, *Interrogations: The Nazi Elite in Allied Hands, 1945* (New York: Viking Penguin Publishing, 2001), 189.

⁹⁸ TWC, 3 January, 1946.

⁹⁹ TWC, 3 January, 1946. Note here that Nikolayev, Ukraine was one of the targeted cities for *Einsatzgruppe D* where there was a high concentration of Jews and partisans. In October 1941, genocide *en masse* was conducted where 40,699 people were murdered over a fourteen-day period. See *Operational Situational Report USSR No. 117* in Arad, Krakowski, and Spector, *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, 194.

themselves from the *Einsatzgruppen*'s crimes. Interestingly, throughout his testimony he continually asserts that he did not necessarily want to partake in mass murder while simultaneously taking responsibility for it. Unlike Goldhagen's views of Ohlendorf, he was most likely driven to kill because he believed that a war against the Jews was essential to the preservation of Germany, rather than because he was driven by fervent anti-Semitic ideology.

Trying to bridge the gap between the intentionalist/functionalist debate, Omer Bartov's *Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories* demonstrates that the solution to fixing the analytical gap lay somewhere in the middle.¹⁰⁰ To Bartov, there is no longer a need to have such mutually exclusive approaches to studying the Holocaust. Although he is a functionalist-leaning historian, he notes that the value in analyses like Goldhagen's is in bringing the debate back to one of underlying anti-Semitism. For Bartov, anti-Semitism was the driving force behind the Holocaust. However, he fuses together an argument where ideology, intent and function all have a place in Holocaust studies.¹⁰¹ Like Bartov, Saul Friedländer has combined both schools of thought into a more moderate, workable form of historical analysis. In "The Extermination of the European Jews in Historiography Fifty Years Later," Friedländer merges the schools of thought into one greater picture of the

¹⁰⁰ Omer Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁰¹ Bartov, *Germany's War*, 2-5.

Reich, with Hitler's anti-Semitic views in the forefront.¹⁰² He suggests that there are inseparable dichotomies within the Reich deserving of equal attention from scholars: modernity and myth. To Friedländer, analyzing the historical background shows the "meeting of logic" regarding modernity in Nazi Germany coexisting with "irrational thinking" where anti-Jewish feelings were part of the "myth."¹⁰³ However, he also stresses that historians cannot sever the ties in these modern-myth relationships, and rather than giving in to a view of this relationship as antagonistic, historians should view it as symbiotic.¹⁰⁴ For example, treating eugenics and anti-Semitism separately is not an inclusive analysis. The debate over how to interpret the Holocaust has evolved into more relevant, complex discussions about interpretation of the Nazi party, its inner-workings, and functionality.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

Finally, and most significantly, the historiographical analyses of today are much less polarized. Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands* serves as a bridge connecting intent and function in several ways.¹⁰⁵ The so-called bloodlands were the territory, previously protected by the Soviet Union, first reached by the *Einsatzgruppen*,

¹⁰² Saul Friedländer, "The Extermination of the European Jews in Historiography Fifty Years Later" in Omer Bartov (ed.) *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 79-91.

¹⁰³ Friedländer, "The Extermination of the European Jews," 82-83.

¹⁰⁴ Friedländer, "The Extermination of the European Jews," 79, 82-84.

¹⁰⁵ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, Perseus, 2010).

where large populations of Jews and partisans had not been evacuated. These people had already been subjugated and persecuted by the Soviets and shipped inland toward the Molotov-Ribbentrop line. With the Barbarossa invasion, these populations were left completely exposed to slaughter, hence the term bloodlands.¹⁰⁶ Snyder asserts that this small overlapping zone of disputed territory was where more than a quarter of Holocaust victims were exterminated.¹⁰⁷ He asserts that the Holocaust was the result of the clash of two empires on their peripheries. Thus, blame and intent have become more open to interpretation. He argues that the Holocaust was the ultimate result of this clash and the ensuing descent into mayhem, which was contingent upon adaptable and ill-defined the borders and actions. *Bloodlands* is a very influential, modern interpretation of genocide that casts away historiographical labels from the past. This is the future of the historiography: showing the shift from strict definitions of motivation, perpetration, intent, function, and organizational murder and reworking the Holocaust into a chaotic, spiraling result of the conflict between two empires.

The struggle to find a unified way of analyzing Nazi Germany and the Holocaust is considerable because there is no singular cause. Christopher Browning agrees with Mason, asserting that “Hitler’s participation...was usually indirect”.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 345.

¹⁰⁷ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 345.

¹⁰⁸ Christopher Browning, “Beyond ‘Intentionalism’ and ‘Functionalism’: A Reassessment of Nazi Jewish Policy from 1939 to 1941” in *Reevaluating the Third Reich*, eds. Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1993), 211-233.

For Browning, intentionalism is based on Hitler's ultimate plan for mass murder. Conversely, functionalists maintain that Hitler and the Nazis were not operating programmatically toward a premeditated goal. Heinz Höhne asserts that if it had not been for individual initiative from careerists like Ohlendorf, the Nazi government would have been stagnant and ineffective. Höhne said Ohlendorf tried to influence the Nazi government and policy with the *Sicherheitsdienst* (Security Service, SD) public opinion polls. "The SD would have sunk into complete insignificance had not Ohlendorf and his people gone on striving to expand their sphere of activity, frequently in opposition to Himmler's declared policies."¹⁰⁹ His viewpoint is not to justify Ohlendorf's actions within the Nazi regime but to point out that Hitler and Himmler were unwilling to have themselves or the SS criticized.

Nevertheless, revisiting these debates is necessary when studying the perpetration of the Holocaust. Furthermore, Ohlendorf's career can be analyzed in terms of intentionalism versus functionalism. The point of this analysis is to demonstrate how categories of individual experiences must be included in any discussion of Holocaust perpetration. Utilizing general statements about perpetrators and victims does not accurately explain the motivations of the Holocaust.

Lastly, this chapter has woven together a brief historiography of Otto Ohlendorf, showing where certain parts of his life have been scrutinized, and where there remains a need to further delve into his life and career. His academic career

¹⁰⁹ Heinz Höhne, *Death's Head*, 257.

needs more focus as Ohlendorf, himself, said his time studying Fascism in Italy is where his devotion to National Socialism was solidified and he “returned as a fanatic antifascist.”¹¹⁰ There are numerous books written that address the differences between Fascism and Nazism, taking into account how Nazis thought the ideologies differed. But, further study is needed here to determine precisely how National Socialism and Fascism were defined by National Socialist ideologues like Ohlendorf. It would show how his belief system was mostly based on independent knowledge and how he sought to perfect the National Socialist system. Other parts of his career demonstrate Ohlendorf’s commitment to Nazi ideology. Knowing more about why he openly criticized Reich policy and what precisely defined his own belief system will reveal inconsistencies in how Nazis, themselves, defined National Socialist ideology. Some particular cornerstones of ideology were anti-Semitism, desire for revenge for the loss of the Great War and treatment at Versailles, equal rights among Aryans, and the maintenance of a strong centralized German government. Trying to reveal where Ohlendorf’s ideology broke away from or adhered to the ideology of the party is a goal of this thesis.

Discussing briefly the intentionalist/functionalist debate in the historiography of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust demonstrates how polarizing the study of perpetrator motivations is. There is so much information we still cannot know: like the existence of the Führer Order, the timing of *Einsatzgruppen* directives, personal motivations, etc. This chapter has tried to hash out the debate by inserting Ohlendorf’s perpetration into the discussion. The conclusions drawn

¹¹⁰ Ohlendorf in Goldensohn, *Interviews*, 388.

here is that Ohlendorf's life and career were both typical and atypical of his Nazi contemporaries. He was not only a follower of National Socialism: He attempted to perfect the doctrine, and the Nazi party valued his loyalty above anything else. Overall, there are deficiencies in the historiography with regard to Ohlendorf. By looking at the whole picture of his life, albeit a picture with its own imperfections, a better understanding of perpetrator motivations can be recognized.

Chapter 3:

Otto Ohlendorf: The Nazi Careerist and Disappointed Ideologue

Otto Ohlendorf's adult life in Nazi Germany was a complex mix of trying to embody his own personal views of National Socialist ideology, while simultaneously sustaining a thriving career. Although he had notorious feuds with notable figures such as Himmler and Heydrich, he still managed to successfully maintain an increasingly powerful position in Nazi service, including promotions to the highest echelons. This discussion addresses events and experiences that molded Ohlendorf's understanding of National Socialism. His often ornery, cantankerous personality and demand for the highest levels of efficiency troubled Himmler in particular, especially when Ohlendorf was tasked with the creation of a system of public opinion reports. How did Ohlendorf maintain a flourishing career in the Nazi party while openly criticizing it and its members? The answer lies within his steadfast dedication to National Socialist ideology. He never waned in his beliefs, nor with his devotion to what he thought an idealized Nazi Germany could and should be. As the most loyal of the *Alter Kämpfer*, his behavior was tolerated. This carried through his entire adult life, career, and through to his death. In his own mind, he was the truest adherent of National Socialism.

This chapter examines Ohlendorf's economic philosophy in detail, revealing its tie to a particular interpretation of Nazi ideology. It asks how and why Ohlendorf was such a staunch advocate for the *Mittelstand* (middle class), and why he saw agriculture as an integral part of the foundations of Nazi society. In the Third Reich, neither of these groups were fully supported, as the wartime economy gave

preference to the accumulation of corporate wealth and distribution of material goods (especially during the war), and did not work well with labor unions.

Ohlendorf strove to champion the underrepresented segments of Nazi society. This is seen throughout his work in academia, with *Reichsgruppe Handel*, the National Trade Union, and the ministry of economics.

In addition to Ohlendorf's role in the economic realm, this chapter will address how Nazis of Ohlendorf's generation of educated academics rose to the top of the RSHA (*Reichsicherheitshauptamt*, or Reich Security Main Office). There were particular roles and ranks through which Ohlendorf and his contemporaries rose as part of National Socialist indoctrination and in the legacy of the *Alter Kämpfer*. In the case of tasks such as leading the *Einsatzgruppen*, these assignments served to break leaders away from desk jobs to implement the Holocaust as a twisted way of proving their dedication to the Nazi party.¹¹¹ Although Ohlendorf never served in a police force or military group, being transferred to the *Einsatzgruppen* boosted his career, and made him even more important within the Reich, especially in the realm of economics.

Meanwhile, Himmler and others openly and personally disliked and distained Ohlendorf. Why was he never fired, replaced, or asked to leave? The answer lay, at least partly, in the concept of the *Alte Kämpfer*, and the way in which preferential treatment was given to Ohlendorf and his compatriots for their

¹¹¹ For more on how the *Einsatzgruppen* leaders were sent to the front from their desk jobs, see the sections in the *Einsatzgruppen* and Trial chapters which address the concept of *Blutkitt*; the idea that participating in crimes spread responsibility throughout the entire Reich leadership and further bound men like Ohlendorf to the Nazi party.

devotion to the party from the early years. His response to personal criticism was to make himself as indispensable as possible to the Nazi regime, and he certainly succeeded. Regarding the public opinion reports, Ohlendorf reported criticism of the Reich and its leadership, causing friction between Himmler and himself. This resulted in Himmler allegedly arranging the transfer of Ohlendorf to the *Einsatzgruppen*, in order to put a stop to the negative reports. Again, it is remarkable that Ohlendorf both survived and thrived, despite his criticism of the Reich. Ohlendorf was a National Socialist fundamentalist who built a life, career, and name for himself by demonstrating his interpretation of Nazi values and ideology. He was an outspoken advocate for middle class reform and an activist. This study begins with Ohlendorf's academic career, and details how and when his ideological views of National Socialism were solidified. Next, it surveys his career in the SD, his promotion to the RSHA, and his extensive influence in the economics ministry. The transfer to the *Einsatzgruppen* and his activities there is dealt with in a separate chapter. Finishing his career track, an analysis of the nature of Ohlendorf's work in the Reich, his promotions, and eventual surrender comprise the conclusion. Ohlendorf's life and career were driven by his ambitious careerist nature, but also his dedication to and belief in National Socialism.

National Socialist Beginnings

Otto Ohlendorf began his political career at an early age. In 1923, when he was eighteen years old, he joined the Nazi party, twice repeating school years because of his political activity, but eventually earning an *Abitur* (high school

diploma).¹¹² According to interviewer Dr. Leon Goldensohn, Ohlendorf claimed his political views led him to the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) and against the Guelphs, a German-Hanoverian pro-Weimar political party. Prior to membership in the SD, Ohlendorf was part of the Bismarck Youth, a party associated with the DNVP (German National People's Party) that was established during Weimar, and opposed to the Treaty of Versailles and the Weimar Republic.¹¹³ Ohlendorf's affiliation with the DNVP was heavily influenced by his father.¹¹⁴ For certain, there is no coincidence that young Ohlendorf switched party alliances two years after the failed Munich Beer Hall Putsch, the event that put Hitler in jail, and later, in the spotlight.¹¹⁵ By 1925, *Mein Kampf* was published, and unquestionably left an indelible impression on the Nazi organization.

¹¹² Gellately, *Interviews*. This publication is a collection of interviews conducted of Nazi war criminals in captivity prior to the *Einsatzgruppen* Trials. Authorized by Goldensohn's estate, his interview of Ohlendorf from Landsberg prison is a chapter included. Of note, the chapter begins with a false year of birth, 1908, but in reality, it was 1907. See Bundesarchiv Berlin, RG R/9361, 2527, document 126144 "Partiestatistische Erhebung 1939" for his correct date of birth and Nazi party membership, May 18, 1925, party number 6531.

¹¹³ For more on the Bismarck Youth, see Robert Gerwath, *The Bismarck Myth: Weimar Germany and the Legacy of the Iron Chancellor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005) and for the DNVP see also Hans Mommsen, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

¹¹⁴ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 155.

¹¹⁵ For more information on the Beer Hall Putsch (or *Hitlerputsch*) there is a wealth of published material, not all academic. For more academic sources, see Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), particularly pp. 128-140, Volker Ullrich, *Hitler: Ascent, 1889-1939* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), and Peter Ross Range, *1924: The Year that Made Hitler* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2016).

A crucial part of Ohlendorf's life and career, and of particular significance in this dissertation, was his identity as an *Alter Kämpfer*, a phrase coined with clear Nazi overtones.¹¹⁶ Because Ohlendorf joined the Nazi party before 1933, and had a prized membership number (#6531) below 100,000, he and other early recruits within the first 100,000 joiners were part of an elite club, the *Alte Kämpfer*. Hitler awarded not only medals and chevrons, but rewarded these "old fighters" with preferential treatment in employment, along with consistent promotions within the party, and favorable government jobs. This was certainly the case of Ohlendorf's career. He was promoted annually, once he was established in the RSHA, and continued to have a thriving, elite career. At the end of the life of the Nazi party's power, Ohlendorf was one of the few selected to accompany Dönitz's ill-fated government to carry on the Nazi party, even after Germany surrendered.

What is significant about Ohlendorf's identification as an *Alter Kämpfer* is that his worldview has direct similarities to aspects of the 1920 Nazi party platform. Written in Munich on February 24, 1920, "*Das Programm der NSDAP*" (The Program of the National Socialist German Worker's Party) was drafted and included twenty-five separate goals of the newly established party.¹¹⁷ Looking back through Ohlendorf's explicit criticisms of the Nazi party when they ascended to power in 1933, there are certain points of the original party doctrine he fought to uphold.

¹¹⁶ Catherine Epstein, *The Last Revolutionaries: German Communists and the Century* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), 3.

¹¹⁷ Jewish Virtual Library, "The Nazi Party: Platform of the National-Socialist German Workers' Party (1933)," *Jewish Virtual Library: A Project of AICE* (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise). <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/platform-of-the-national-socialist-german-workers-rsquo-party> (accessed August 12, 2017).

Some of these included: requirements for nationalism (that specifically excluded Jews from becoming German nationals), equal rights and duties of German citizens, profit sharing in large enterprises, demanding punishment for anyone who would harm the “common good,” freedom of religion (Christian religion), and most importantly, the “creation and maintenance of a sound middle class.”¹¹⁸ Throughout his career, Ohlendorf maintained these values.

According to Michael Wildt, Ohlendorf and his contemporaries, politically active intellectual and university youths, were drawn into the Nazi party because of built up resentment from Germany’s defeat in the Great War. Ohlendorf was too young to enlist, so the postwar years of economic scarcity and political instability fueled contempt for Weimar and its political institutions.¹¹⁹ Wildt asserts that Ohlendorf was part of this “Uncompromising Generation.” Seventy-five percent of the future RSHA leaders were born after 1900 and some, like Ohlendorf, eventually became Holocaust perpetrators.¹²⁰

The men of the RSHA were born into social classes “whose values they no longer accepted” and were raised in the Weimar Republic, and to them, a strange

¹¹⁸ Jewish Virtual Library, “The Nazi Party.”

¹¹⁹ Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, 9-11.

¹²⁰ This is one of the main arguments of Wildt’s *Uncompromising Generation*. He collected statistics on each leader of the RSHA and based his findings on facts from their personnel files.

entity imposed on the German people by the Western powers.¹²¹ The lure of the SD offered men like Ohlendorf a way to voice and address grievances with the Nazi government. In the early years, Ohlendorf and his contemporaries thought that if they worked for the Reich, they could “fix” National Socialism from within, and be a part of the decision-making process.¹²² They were critical of the regime because their generation was convinced that in order for Weimar to topple and a new regime to be successful, they *must* play a role in not only the creation of policy, but in holding the new government responsible to its campaign promises. The economy was depressed, their parents suffered at the hands of a weak, foreign mandated government. In its quest for legitimacy, the Third Reich hired intellectuals and experts like Ohlendorf so as to convince the German people and the world that this government had infinite capabilities. Although Ohlendorf’s career took shape much differently than he anticipated, the constants that drove him to the top were his arrogant, honest character, his immeasurable careerist motivations, and his *Alter Kämpfer* self-righteousness.

Education and Early Careerism (1923-1936)

Ohlendorf’s post-secondary education was similar to that of his RSHA contemporaries, some of whom were his fellow defendants in the 1948

¹²¹ David Kitermann, “Otto Ohlendorf: Gralshüter des Nationalsozialismus,” in Roland Smelser and Enrico Syring, eds. *Die Elite unter dem Totenkopf* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 2000), 379-380.

¹²² Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, introduction.

Einsatzgruppen Trials. They were university-educated intellectuals, experts in a variety of fields, the backbone of the Nazi bureaucracy, and in charge of implementing Third Reich policy in Germany. However, according to Hilary Earl, not all of the 1948 trial defendants were of the same “caliber and degree” as Ohlendorf, as only 50% of them had completed a university degree.¹²³ Ohlendorf’s educational track led him to a degree in jurisprudence at the University of Leipzig. He then studied economics at the University of Göttingen. Although he never acquired a degree in economics, in the summer of 1931, he was awarded a scholarship to do a two-semester study abroad, in political economics, to the University of Pavia, near Milan, Italy.¹²⁴

In Italy, Ohlendorf studied the Fascist system’s philosophy of international law, and claimed to have solidified his belief in a purist version of National Socialism.¹²⁵ In retrospect, a general study of Fascist and National Socialist ideologies yields some nuanced differences, but to Ohlendorf, the differences were very pronounced.¹²⁶ He said this about studying in Italy: “I returned as a fanatic

¹²³ Earl, *Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 117 and Herbert Ziegler, *Nazi Germany’s New Aristocracy: The SS Leadership 1925-1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 87.

¹²⁴ *Bunderarchiv* RG3101 “Der SS-Reichsführer, Personal-Akte, Ohlendorf, Otto, SS-nr. 880,” file page dated 7.IX.31, Ohlendorf’s announcement to the president of the court of his scholarship for study abroad.

¹²⁵ *TWC*, 223-225. For segments of testimony, see also Robert Wolfe, “Putative National Security Defense: Extracts from the Testimony of Nazi SS Group Leader Otto Ohlendorf at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials” in Roy L. Brooks, ed., *When Sorry Isn’t Enough: The Controversy Over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 52.

¹²⁶ There are many books and articles written about parallels and differences between Italian Fascism and National Socialism. Most of the intellectual scholarship portrays Nazi

antifascist.”¹²⁷ He intended to use his experience in Italy as the beginning of his “lifetime’s work,” as he allegedly desired a university academic career.¹²⁸ However, Ohlendorf’s return to Germany meant he proceeded with his legal training and qualifications. Yet Hanno Sowade argued that in 1933, he was saved by Prof. Dr. Jens Jessen from an “unwanted career” in law.¹²⁹ At the time, Jessen was the head of the Royal Institute for Maritime Transport and World Economics at the University of Kiel, and was recruiting scholars for the 1934 unveiling of the new Kiel Institute for World Economics.¹³⁰ Ohlendorf’s professional drive leaned toward academics, and even in 1944, late in his RSHA career, he still gave lectures and wanted to teach.

While Ohlendorf’s fanatical anti-fascist philosophy shaped his entire National Socialist career, he often incurred criticism for his opinions. Although National Socialism bred a new type of totalitarian regime, it was essentially a fascist state

Germany as a Fascist state. For more on Totalitarianism, Fascism, and Nazism, see especially Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando: Harcourt Books, 1968), Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: First Vintage Books, 2007), Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2003), Richard Bessel, *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: Comparisons and Contrasts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Timothy Mason, *Nazism, Fascism and the Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Geoff Eley, *Nazism as Fascism: Violence, Ideology and the Ground of Consent in Germany, 1930-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2013), Giuseppe Finaldi, *Mussolini and Italian Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

¹²⁷ Ohlendorf interview by Goldensohn in *The Nuremberg Interviews*, 388.

¹²⁸ Sowade, “Otto Ohlendorf,” 156.

¹²⁹ Sowade, “Otto Ohlendorf,” 156.

¹³⁰ More information about Jessen will be discussed later, but for a good biography, see Regina Schlüter-Ahrens, *Der Volkswirt Jens Jessen. Leben und Werk* (Marburg: Metropolis-Verlag, 2001).

with similarities to the Mussolini regime, both of which were derived from state-run dictatorships. However, Ohlendorf vehemently believed otherwise. During a conversation with Felix Kersten, Himmler's personal doctor during the war, Ohlendorf explained his view that fascism and National Socialism were completely opposed to each other, saying "Fascism began by deifying the state and refusing to recognize those human communities which were based on nature; but National Socialism was itself based on those natural communities and on the men who belonged to them."¹³¹ Clearly, Ohlendorf criticized an important element of Italian fascism, that Mussolini declared himself the "state" and "godlike".

Drawing distinctions between the two ideologies, Ohlendorf reflected on how Himmler and others misinterpreted both ideologies, saying "there are men who have a great deal to gain from the fascist divinization of the state and who would like to put the Führer himself in the place of God."¹³² He criticized many Nazi leaders for not understanding his version of purist National Socialist ideology, based on communal politics, life and economics, calling Göring, a "capitalist" and Ley, a Bolshevik sympathizer. According to Felix Kersten, Himmler's personal physician and masseur, Ohlendorf was most concerned with collectivizing the entire German

¹³¹ Felix Kersten, *The Kersten Memoirs: 1940-1945* (New York and Tokyo: Ishi Press, 1956), 207. Please note here that what Kersten presents in this publication are pages from his diary of dated conversations he had between Reich officials and Himmler. They are to be analyzed with the mindset that Kersten wanted to appear favorably to Himmler and his reactions to alleged conversations are certainly not without bias. However, his assessment of conversations with Ohlendorf prove valuable to studying particular subjects like Fascism and his documentation of Ohlendorf's alleged commentary is aligned with other primary documents of Ohlendorf's conversation-style.

¹³² Kersten, *Memoirs*, 207.

community, but not for individual profit, nor for the empowerment of the police state. He stated that the difference was Germany's "historic tradition to maintain small...businesses...free and independent" while fascist economics demands that the state take control of all business and industry.¹³³

Kersten's written response to Ohlendorf's lesson on fascism was one of shock. "Never before had I received such a lecture on economics and the state. At the same time, I was astounded at the frankness with which Ohlendorf had spoken."¹³⁴ This statement is not surprising in the least and, in fact, is consistent with everything written and documented about Ohlendorf's character. Like Kersten's account of Ohlendorf's fervent anti-fascist sentiment, Dr. Leon Goldensohn, the psychologist who interviewed the Landsberg prisoners, in *The Nuremberg Interviews* asked "how could you be in a fascist party and be a fanatic antifascist?"¹³⁵ Ohlendorf replied by saying "It's regrettable that you think they are the same. There is much difference. Fascism is a purely state principle...in National Socialism, it was the opposite. People and humans come first, and the state is secondary." Ohlendorf, for all intents and purposes, was the only Nazi who spoke out as such, and although he hoped others would realize these ideological distinctions, they did not. True to his belief in Nationalist Socialism, Ohlendorf

¹³³ Kersten, *Memoirs*, 207-208. Kersten alleged that he was asking Ohlendorf to expand upon his view of the ideological differences between Fascism and National Socialism and cited are small parts of Ohlendorf's response to Kersten dated 29 August, 1943.

¹³⁴ Kersten, *Memoirs*, 208.

¹³⁵ Goldensohn, *Interviews*, 388.

became known as the “*Gralshüter des Nationalsozialismus*,” or the keeper of the Holy Grail of National Socialism.¹³⁶ Despite his zealous loathing of fascism, Ohlendorf’s return from Italy took his career in a direction different from academia. He became a licensed lawyer.

Between 1931 and 1932, Ohlendorf composed several requests to the high court of Germany to suspend his law practicing license for the duration of his time abroad. Having been sworn in on September 15, 1931, he intended to use his law degree as a backup career track while pursuing his desire to work in academia.¹³⁷ After being awarded the study abroad scholarship, his first leave request was granted in September 1931, and he was reinstated by the *Oberlandesgerichtspräsidenten* (regional Court justice) to the courts in August 1932. True to his desire to pursue an academic career, when approached by Jessen from the University of Kiel to leave the court system in favor of a position in higher education, Ohlendorf again requested leave in September 1933. It was granted, and in October 1934, he wrote to the high courts asking for an extension of leave because he was conducting “great scientific work” at the Kiel Institute.¹³⁸ This time, the courts denied his leave with an addendum stating that upon his return to

¹³⁶ This is the phrase David Kitermann used in “Otto Ohlendorf: Gralshüter des Nationalismus.”

¹³⁷ See *Bunderarchiv* RG3101, 35438 “Reichswirtschaftsministerium Personalakten, Ohlendorf”, document 8, for his signed oath. This and other documents in the personnel files of the Ministry of Economics are written requests to the *Oberlandesgerichtspräsidenten* and back to Ohlendorf. Hereafter entitled “RWM Personalakten.”

¹³⁸ See “Reichswirtschaftsministerium” document dated October 3, 1934.

service, he would have to restart the application process anew.¹³⁹ Ohlendorf's career in academia was again put on hold.

Upon his return from studying abroad, Ohlendorf was employed as barrister at the Hanover *Amtsgerichte* (District Court), and from April 1933- October 1933 in the Hildesheim *Landesgericht* (National Court). Following a short-lived law career, he was recruited by Prof. Dr. Jens Jessen, head of the University of Kiel's *Institut für Weltwirtschaft und Seeverkehr* (Institute for World Economics and Maritime Traffic) to establish a department for fascism and National Socialism. Here, Ohlendorf served as scientific assistant.¹⁴⁰ According to the Combined Services Detailed Interrogations Center (CSDIC, United Kingdom) "Prisoner Interrogations" report, Ohlendorf stated that he abandoned his academic pursuit of an advanced degree in economics to join Jessen in Kiel.¹⁴¹ During the trial, he claimed he and Jessen had a falling out with local party officials over their own economic theories and criticism of National Socialist policies.¹⁴² Interestingly, nowhere is this mentioned except in the Appendix of the "Prisoner Interrogations" conducted by the CSDIC (UK division). But in the CSDIC's timeline of Ohlendorf's life events, they wrote that he claimed to

¹³⁹ See "RWM Personalakten", documents from August 8, 1932, September 21, 1933, October 3, 1934 and October 10, 1934 to trace the leave process.

¹⁴⁰ Ohlendorf's Curriculum Vitae, dated 26.4.1936, *Bundesarchiv* Berlin Nachlaß Ohlendorf, Otto, Personal-Akte, SS-nr. 880, 866-867, microfilm.

¹⁴¹ Combined Services Detailed Interrogations Center (CSDIC), (UK) Report on Information Obtained from PW CS/2262 SS Gruf Ohlendorf, September 30, 1945, "Appendix I". Subsequent references will be cited as "CSDIC (UK), and the date of the document."

¹⁴² Testimony of Otto Ohlendorf, 8 October, 1947, *Trial*, roll 2, 484-488.

have been “imprisoned” with Jessen, with both forced to resign their positions for alleged “anti-Bolshevist” beliefs.¹⁴³ Ohlendorf said he and Jessen were “forced” to resign their appointments in Kiel and found the same type of opposition at a different academic venue.¹⁴⁴ This indicates that the economic theories they were supporting and presenting were not in line with Nazi economic policy. It also shows the totalitarian nature of the regime, even in the beginning years, by revealing this type of academic censorship applied to Ohlendorf and Jessen.

In November 1934, Ohlendorf and Jessen were invited to transform the trade college, *Handelhochschule* Berlin, into a university for applied economics, *Wirtschaftshochschule*. The next month, Ohlendorf was named director of the Institute for Applied Economics, but by January 1935, he was the director of the Department of Applied Sciences.¹⁴⁵ Jessen and Ohlendorf’s master plan was to create a National Socialist University of Economics; they failed because their economic theories and teachings were too radical even for the Nazi party. Under Jessen’s tutelage, Ohlendorf’s time in academia offered the opportunity to put economic theory into action, developing what Earl called a “highly personal theory of economics.”¹⁴⁶ They sought economic reform through “middle-class oriented”

¹⁴³ CSDIC (UK), Appendix I. There is no record of any arrest or imprisonment in Ohlendorf’s Personal-Akte, SS-Nr. 880 in the *Bundesarchiv* Nachlaß Ohlendorf, Otto, nor in Hanno Sowade’s article, or found in any work, scholarly or otherwise.

¹⁴⁴ Earl, “Criminal Biographies,” 168-169.

¹⁴⁵ CSDIC (UK), “Appendix I”.

¹⁴⁶ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 62.

economic ideology. Research and public opinion were to be instrumental in spurring economic growth.¹⁴⁷ Conflict with local party officials caused Ohlendorf to realize his career in academia was over.¹⁴⁸ The only place an *Alter Kämpfer* could thrive was in the Nazi party and/or Nazi government. He reactivated his membership in the SS (*Schutzstaffel*, or protection squadron), applied to the SD, and persuaded Jessen to take a position there too. Ohlendorf's potential career with the Reich was not likely because of his continual insistence on his own philosophy, even if independent from party politics.¹⁴⁹

Ohlendorf's relationship with Jessen soured after he decided to revisit his party affiliation, with encouragement from Jessen.¹⁵⁰ Since Ohlendorf went to the SD and likely feared his academic career would not come to fruition, he further indoctrinated himself in Nazi ideology and policy, something Jessen most likely saw as a betrayal. Jessen became an increasingly controversial character in Nazi politics, being among the few individuals in academia to continue criticizing National Socialism up through 1944, even when he worked in the Army General Staff.

¹⁵¹ Staying in Berlin, Jessen became part of the resistance movement, and was

¹⁴⁷ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 157.

¹⁴⁸ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 156 and Earl, "Criminal Biographies", 168.

¹⁴⁹ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 156.

¹⁵⁰ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 156.

¹⁵¹ Also, Peter Hoffmann described Jessen as having been part of assassination plots as early as 1941 in *Behind Valkyrie: German Resistance to Hitler (Documents)*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill and Queen's University Press, 2011), 194.

involved in the 20 July, 1944 unsuccessful assassination attempt on Hitler's life: *Operation Valkyrie*.¹⁵² On November 30, 1944, Jessen was hanged for treason, along with 100 others on the periphery of association with the *Wolfsschanze* (Wolf's Lair) plot. At this time, Ohlendorf was not only RSHA Amt III leader, but also undersecretary to the Minister of Economics. He had enough influence, especially after his time served with the *Einsatzgruppen*, to have bargained for Jessen's life, but he "did not move a finger."¹⁵³ Had Ohlendorf done so, his loyalties would have been questioned, and his career finished, likely suffering the same fate as Jessen. Heinz Höhne pointed out that Ohlendorf had a "sleepless night" when Jessen was hanged, and made a "conscience-stricken promise henceforth to share his salary with the Jessen family."¹⁵⁴ Ohlendorf and Jessen shared the same economic ideology and, like Jessen, Ohlendorf found many aspects of the Third Reich problematic. His relationship with Jessen was raised in cross-examination at the Nuremberg trials; in a *New York Times* article, he was questioned about the "German economist" who was "considered friendly" until 1938, and was a "suspect" in the 20 July plot to

¹⁵² For more information on the 20 July plot, there are numerous articles and books. Some that mention Jens Peter Jessen are Klemens von Klemperer, *German Resistance Against Hitler: The Search for Allies Abroad 1938–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), Peter Hoffmann, *The History of German Resistance, 1933-1945* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill and Queen's University Press, 1996), and Hermann Graml, Hans Mommsen, Hans-Joachim Reichhardt, and Ernst Wolf, eds., in *The German Resistance to Hitler* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970).

¹⁵³ Höhne, *Death's Head*, 514-515.

¹⁵⁴ Heinz Höhne interview with Frau Käthe Ohlendorf and Frau Käthe Jessen, Jan. 1966, and Höhne, 514-515.

assassinate Hitler.¹⁵⁵ However, Ohlendorf betrayed his friend, continued to pursue his career, and died a war criminal, while Jessen died a martyr of German resistance.

Sicherheitsdienst (SD)

In May 1936, Ohlendorf was offered a position in the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*), which, in 1939, became RSHA Amt III (SD-Inland), in charge of the domestic intelligence service. At this point, he already had a record of distinguished service in National Socialism.¹⁵⁶ In 1936, the same year that Ohlendorf joined the SD, Himmler became the Chief of German Police, and Heydrich, the Chief of the Gestapo. Ohlendorf saw the SD-Inland as “purely an intelligence agency” that was meant to assess the “mood and attitude” of the people. What drew him to the SD was, in his words, that it was “the only authority offering criticism within the Reich and reporting facts from an objective point of view to top levels.”¹⁵⁷ In a totalitarian state, reporting on public opinion is controlled, but the Nazi dictatorship demonstrated a great deal of interest in what ordinary German citizens thought of the regime. Ohlendorf developed the public opinion service to gather “useful” intelligence on enemies in the Reich.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Tania Long, “Mass-Killing Chief Describes His Task,” *New York Times* (New York, NY) January 4, 1946.

¹⁵⁶ Smith, “Colonel Ohlendorf,” 1. Smith’s article remains the most detailed and comprehensive writing analyzing the RSHA (and SD) opinion reports. He summarized the *Meldungen aus dem Reich* and described the information-gathering process.

¹⁵⁷ TWC, Ohlendorf Testimony, 30, Jan. 1946.

¹⁵⁸ Smith, “Colonel Ohlendorf,” 1.

Ohlendorf was hired to build up the SD's security service. At the time, he was recruited by Reinhard Höhn, a law professor at the University of Berlin, who felt the SD "needed critical intellects like his."¹⁵⁹ Höhn also tried to attract Jessen into service in the SD, and though Jessen did not officially join, other intellectuals like Franz Six did.¹⁶⁰ Under Höhn's supervision, Ohlendorf became director of the *Ableitung II* (the Economic Division) where data was collected, analyzed and reported. Next, he became section leader of the Central Division (*Zentralableitung*), where he established an agency for collecting intelligence on critical comments.¹⁶¹ The reports were designed to give feedback to Nazi leaders regarding their policies, leadership, and elements of propaganda. However, this was all done by having agents secretly observe regular people's actions and conversations. Ohlendorf saw this as not only an opportunity to analyze the growth of the Nazi regime, but to also influence his own research agenda; implementing his own economic theories. Both Ohlendorf and Höhn established the *Lebensgebietarbeit*, "systematic observation of social spheres" and its significance escalated with the creation of the 1939 RSHA.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Höhne, *Death's Head*, 213.

¹⁶⁰ Höhne, *Death's Head*, 213-214. Höhne discussed how Höhn made the rounds in the intellectual community trying to recruit young minds to the SD and that even Jessen "fell under the spell" of Höhn. Franz Six was Ohlendorf's colleague in the *Einsatzgruppen*, leader of division B. Prior to that, he was a political scientist and professor at the University of Berlin. Unlike Ohlendorf, Six was not sentenced to death at Nuremberg, and lived the life of a retiree until his death in 1975. For more information on Six, see Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, Höhne's, *Death's Head* and several other books on Nazi Germany and the Holocaust have small portions of his life and work, especially Rhodes, *Masters of Death*.

¹⁶¹ Earl, *Nuremberg*, 63, Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 156-157, and Smith, "Colonel Ohlendorf," 2.

¹⁶² Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, 140-141.

They both agreed that the SD was their vehicle to influence the development of National Socialism.¹⁶³

However, throughout Ohlendorf's affidavits and testimony, he consistently complained that Himmler and other Nazi leaders were displeased with the Reich reports he compiled. For instance, Ohlendorf criticized the rearmament of Germany because it drew economic resources away from independent production in favor of big business, saying it caused "unparalleled strains" on the economy.¹⁶⁴ Ohlendorf composed the *Meldungen aus dem Reich* up through his return from his *Einsatzgruppe* duties. But in 1936, at the beginning of his career in the Reich, he was already notorious for being an opinionated, outspoken intellectual, a characterization that followed him throughout his life and career. He was avidly insistent on instilling purist Nazi philosophy through his loyalties as an *Alter Kämpfer*, promoting the Reich, and demonstrating areas in need of improvement, that he was viewed as an egotistical know-it-all who, as a British interrogator said, "has a host of ideas on every subject".¹⁶⁵

When Ohlendorf became an official in the SD in 1936, he had at his disposal a "wide variety" of confiscated materials, reflecting "group attitudes" within Germany and toward National Socialism and Hitler, which became the basis of the public

¹⁶³ Höhne, *Death's Head*, 234.

¹⁶⁴ Höhne, *Death's Head*, 235.

¹⁶⁵ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 62 and CSDIC (UK), August 11, 1945, RG 319, "Ohlendorf folder".

opinion reports.¹⁶⁶ Ohlendorf was approved to hire a staff of twenty-four experts to compose, distribute, and analyze surveys of the German people from the beginning of WWII.¹⁶⁷ Confidential agents were directed to poll certain segments of the population, compile their statistics, and report back to Ohlendorf. Drafts of questionnaire poll results were given to Himmler, Ley, and other high-ranking officials. The reports were often negative, pessimistic, and critical about Reich economic policy and its future standing, which did nothing to endear them to Himmler and others in power. Ohlendorf said of the SD, “the first disappointment was to find that there was no such thing as an SD information organization.”¹⁶⁸ Although the SD was an important professional move for Ohlendorf, at the time he was disenchanted and vocal about it. In this way, he brought attention to himself, and was regarded as problematic by Nazi administrators. In addition, Heinz Höhne argued that the Nazi party “bosses did not find the SD men particularly impressive.”¹⁶⁹ Ohlendorf’s reputation for frankness of character and stubborn behavior marked him, despite his impressive and self-driven *Alter Kämpfer* career, complete with prestigious decorations and promotions.

Hilary Earl asserts that Ohlendorf’s unorthodox style was appreciated in the

¹⁶⁶ Smith, “Colonel Ohlendorf,” 2.

¹⁶⁷ Smith, “Colonel Ohlendorf,” 2.

¹⁶⁸ Otto Ohlendorf, “How I came to be employed in Russia,” deposition in custody (undated), in the private papers of Käthe Ohlendorf: quoted in Heinz Höhne, *The Order of Death’s Head*, 210.

¹⁶⁹ Höhne, *Death’s Head*, 210.

post-Depression years, while Sowade argued that he attracted the “enmity” of several Nazi officials for his reports. Both agree that he incurred the most wrath specifically concerning the Four Year Plan, a proposal to stimulate the economy through an increase of corporate jobs.¹⁷⁰ This led to amassed individual wealth and did not help the middle class. Unfortunately for Ohlendorf, his stubborn, unfiltered criticism of Nazi economic policy left him disenfranchised and “out in the cold.”¹⁷¹ He requested to leave the SD to work in the economic sector, but Heydrich denied the request, and Ohlendorf’s work in the SD was reduced to “honorary duties.”¹⁷² Ohlendorf’s wife, Käthe, referred to this as a “temporary halt” in his career, as her husband repeatedly tried to either transfer, or leave the SD. However, Himmler and Heydrich refused; Mrs. Ohlendorf said he continued to serve as a volunteer in the afternoons.¹⁷³ However, Ohlendorf admitted in testimony that he had “long

¹⁷⁰ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 63, Sowade, “Otto Ohlendorf,” 157, see also Ohlendorf testimony, *TWC*, October 7, 8, 15, 1947. The Four Year Plan, 1936-1940, was enacted by Hermann Göring and was meant to stimulate the German economy by creating jobs in rearmament and munitions ministries with the belief that Germany needed to prove itself completely self-sufficient. This was clearly more of a policy of personal gain than one that made economic sense, as Göring himself, and other prominent Nazi leaders made vast amounts of wealth from relationships with particular factories. Also, this plan was designed with the idea of war preparation at the forefront. Another aspect of this plan was to unite the security services under one larger SS umbrella with Himmler at the helm. For more reading on this subject see Francis R. Nicosia and Jonathan Huener, eds. *Business and Industry in Nazi Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), Richard Overy, *The Nazi Economic Recovery*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and especially Adam Tooze who asserts that 25% of Germany’s economic investment went to the plan in *Wages of Destruction*.

¹⁷¹ Sowade, “Otto Ohlendorf,” 157.

¹⁷² Sowade, “Otto Ohlendorf,” 157.

¹⁷³ Käthe Ohlendorf, *Letter to David Irving*. See also Hilary Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, she states that Ohlendorf’s position was made into part-time, but eventually this was concurrent with being transferred to *Reichsgruppe Handel*, 64.

negotiations” with Heydrich, who eventually allowed reassignment to *Reichsgruppe Handel* (Reich Commerce Group) in 1938.¹⁷⁴ After joining the National Trade Group, Ohlendorf devised his small and medium-sized business economic stimulus plan, and although his ideas were in opposition to Party economics, he was promoted to Chief Secretary by 1939.¹⁷⁵ Despite his criticism of other party members and their interpretation of Nazi philosophy, he was indeed needed in the Reich because of his expertise on economic policy. Whatever grievances Heydrich and Himmler had with Ohlendorf, ultimately, they recognized his value in instituting economic policies. From here on, his career prospered through promotions.

Ohlendorf's Economy

How did Ohlendorf become known as an expert in economics? The connection between expertise in law and economics in his professional career is puzzling, at least initially. He received his advanced degree in jurisprudence, but was recruited first to Kiel and then to Berlin to build institutes for economics. Academics like Ohlendorf often chose economics as a related subject of study associated with law.¹⁷⁶ Christian Ingrao argues that economics provided an “intellectual bridge” between academics and activism; and here Ohlendorf, and other Nazi academics, became activists.¹⁷⁷ From this perspective, it is

¹⁷⁴ TWC, Ohlendorf testimony, October 8, 1947, pp. 227-232.

¹⁷⁵ Sowade, “Otto Ohlendorf,” 157.

¹⁷⁶ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 39.

¹⁷⁷ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 39.

understandable that the Reich recognized Ohlendorf as an economics expert.

Coupled with his work at the economic institutes in Berlin and Kiel, Ohlendorf was viewed as a specialized kind of expert, useful to the Nazi party. By 1943, Ohlendorf assumed his previous role as leader of RSHA AMT III (Reich Security Main Office, Division Three), and was the second in command in the Ministry of Economics. He had succeeded in making himself indispensable to the Reich.

Nazi philosophy and policies dictated every aspect of the Nazi state, including the economy. After the depression, the first step toward German economic recovery was to broaden economic growth through technological innovation, in order to stimulate the accumulation of physical and human capital.¹⁷⁸ Creating jobs by employing the state-sponsored workforce of “semi-skilled” laborers, specifically metalworkers, would increase production and German labor as it was “rhetorically revalorized”.¹⁷⁹ For Adam Tooze, Hitler’s aggression and overarching plan for war and genocide was absolutely unsustainable from the beginning. Nevertheless, Nazi leadership proceeded with the war and the Holocaust not only because of Nazi motivations and drive to do so. Their economy was based on the principles of rearmament, and heavily relied on big business corporations to utilize mass production. An important fusion of Nazi philosophy with economics has concrete manifestations in the creation of the so-called *Volksgemeinschaft*, a community of

¹⁷⁸ Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, 143-144.

¹⁷⁹ Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, 144.

the people who sacrificed personal interests for that of the greater good of Germany and the Aryan race.

The *Mittelstand*, or small business section, of Nazi Germany rapidly became disenfranchised. With the rise of the Nazi party and their eventual takeover of the German government, an “amalgamation” of economic and military spheres created a new class of elites, one which left the middle class by the wayside.¹⁸⁰ The middle class, from which Ohlendorf came, was thwarted by the need for rearmament; independent craftsmen and small-scale manufacturers were restricted by state run corporations.¹⁸¹ As industries increased production, employment opportunities increased, and many small farmers and artisans relocated to industrial towns to pursue employment. The Reich propaganda machine attempted to blur the lines between white and blue-collar work in the “blood and soil” (*blut und boden*) campaign.¹⁸² The phrase, coined by R. Walther Darré, had not only venerated the farmers, but also attributed to them a status higher than that of the middle or

¹⁸⁰ Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 88.

¹⁸¹ Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 87-89.

¹⁸² Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 91-95. The “blood and soil” campaign was one of the mantras of Goebbels propaganda machine, which advocated for Aryan ethnicity based on pure “blood” and “territory,” (later incorporated with *Lebensraum*. This concept was glorified in Nazi Germany for promotion of the cultivation of one’s own homeland, and venerated agricultural production, from the ground level. Richard Walther Darré popularized the phrase with his book entitled *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden* (Munich: J.F. Lebmans Verlag, 1930). For more on the so-called “blood and soil” campaign see Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007). For an interesting read on Darré see Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler’s ‘Green Party’* (Abbotsbrook, Buckinghamshire: The Kensal Press, 1985).

working class, a concept rooted in eugenics and racial theory. Prior to Hitler's ascendancy to Germany's chancellorship in 1933, the ideas of "blood and soil" were ingrained in the agrarian, rural communities of Germany. However, as the Nazis rose to power, they fashioned the "blood and soil" campaign into an immense propaganda measure, targeting the whole of Germany and the creation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, or people's community. The idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was one of the most important components of Nazi ideology and economics.

In general terms, Ohlendorf fought for a Nazi-run, state controlled system of economics that would most benefit the middle class, *Mittelstand*. The term was coined during the Stresseman era, and is literally translated "middle estate," referring to owners of small and medium-sized businesses, clerks, and white-collar workers, describing the middle layer of Weimar society.¹⁸³ By the time the Nazis came to power however, this group of people and small-scale farmers were fused together into the *Mittelstand*. In *The Nazi Party in Lower Saxony*, Jeremy Noakes argued that the classification of *Mittelstand* was "archaic status evaluation" that denoted economic status rather than class.¹⁸⁴ According to Ludolf Herbst, Ohlendorf was one of the "most prominent advocates" of Nazi middle-class policy.¹⁸⁵ He was a National Socialist of the "purest waters," because he understood the importance of

¹⁸³ Detlef Mühlberger, *Hitler's Voice: The Völkischer Beobachter, 1920-1933: Vol. I Organisation and Development of the Nazi Party* (Bern: Peter Lang, AG, 2004), 159.

¹⁸⁴ Jeremy Noakes, *The Nazi Party in Lower Saxony, 1921-1933* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1971), 108.

¹⁸⁵ Herbst, *Der Totale Krieg*, 225.

the middle class in the success of National Socialist ideology.¹⁸⁶ When Ohlendorf was associated with Jessen and the economic sphere, they both argued for a Nazi economic theory based on a domestic market provided by the middle class and products.¹⁸⁷

Ohlendorf's time in the academic realm offered him the opportunity to combine his interests in practical economic theory with that of National Socialism.¹⁸⁸ As an academic and a contributor to *Reichsgruppe Handel*, Ohlendorf consistently lobbied against state ownership of corporations, which contributed to the closing of small businesses.¹⁸⁹ He believed that if the government spent beyond its means to have state mandated control of big business, as fascist Italy did, there would be an end to entrepreneurship, and the Görings of Germany would accumulate too much power through corporate wealth.¹⁹⁰ In one sense, he advocated for a free market, one with a thriving national economy and strong small business sector. This is not to be confused with a true market economy with free trade. The economy would be controlled by the Nazi party, yet regulated in a more equitable fashion, with protections for the small business sector. In promoting these ideas, Ohlendorf challenged how big businesses acquired wealth, and

¹⁸⁶ Herbst, *Der Totale Krieg*, 276. The original text is "Nationalsozialisten reinsten Wassers."

¹⁸⁷ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 39.

¹⁸⁸ Herbst, *Der Totale Krieg*, 183.

¹⁸⁹ Herbst, *Der Totale Krieg*, 228 and Earl, "Criminal Biographies," 174.

¹⁹⁰ Earl, "Criminal Biographies," 174-175.

advocated for domestic and maritime trade and the middle class, who would be the greatest beneficiaries of the measures he supported. To Ohlendorf, this was completely aligned with National Socialist ideology and unequivocally anti-Bolshevik, even though the Bolsheviks held the working class in greater esteem than any other social class. It was also anti-fascist, which to Ohlendorf was an unjust, dictatorial, state-run system that ignored the rights and needs of the people, centering the system around the state. He was completely opposed to the “*Bürokratisierung der Wirtschaft*” (bureaucratization of the economy), which in fact did take place, because of the war.¹⁹¹ To Ohlendorf, adding more control and more people to regulate the economy was the opposite of a Nazi economy. However, in its need to quickly acquire and accumulate war materials, the Nazi government did not share Ohlendorf’s economic theories.

At the beginning of Ohlendorf’s career in economics, he aspired to create a National Socialist University of Economics. Near the end of the war, Ohlendorf again spoke of how to properly integrate economics, trade, academia, and National Socialism under one inseparable entity.¹⁹² He sought to create a national archive of economics; by gathering intelligence reports from multiple sources, he hoped to generate a centralized plan for the national economy. His goal was to essentially design a database for Nazi economic policy that incorporated expert information from many subject areas, to be used in the future, specifically in the post-war era.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Herbst, *Der Totale Krieg*, 268.

¹⁹² Herbst, *Der Totale Krieg*, 279.

¹⁹³ Herbst, *Der Totale Krieg*, 279.

Ohlendorf, sharing Hitler's view, always thought of Germany in a romantic, glorified, and utopian way, according to Herbst. He wanted Germany to be an agrarian-based Reich.¹⁹⁴ This dovetailed with his ties to the Anthroposophical society, and his support of organic, biodynamic farming.¹⁹⁵ The theories of biodynamic farming, developed by the founder of the Anthroposophical society, Rudolf Steiner, combined organic farming techniques with esoteric principles. Having been raised on a farm may have ingrained in Ohlendorf the philosophy of "green," organic farming. Despite the fact that, early on, the Nazis banned all sorts of organizations, including religious groups and those not aligned with National Socialist ideology, the Anthroposophical society was not banned until later. Ohlendorf believed that aspects of the society's theories, such as biodynamics, were applicable to German agriculture and society, and were in line with Nazi philosophy. This would create an unequivocal bond between the Aryan race, the soil, and what Germany was consuming.¹⁹⁶ However, because of the ties between biodynamics and Anthroposophy, Himmler and other Reich leaders rejected its tenets. The Nazi party

¹⁹⁴ Herbst, *Der Totale Krieg*, 283.

¹⁹⁵ For a more detailed analysis of Ohlendorf and the Anthroposophical Society, see the *Einsatzgruppen* chapter for an argument of the reasons for his transfer to the Ukraine, part of which is based on his association with the society.

¹⁹⁶ Peter Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism: Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill NV Publications, 2014), 142-143. Staudenmaier notes that there was an experimental piece of land in Dachau where biodynamics was utilized in the creation of medicinal plants. Also, he discusses how biodynamic techniques were used in eastern-occupied territories, like Posen, Poland, how in theory, using purification techniques in the soil would better serve the repopulation of the Aryan race in all future occupied territories.

wanted to avoid being internationally affiliated with farming techniques that arose from what they saw as a cult society.

Biodynamics was part of a backlash against technology in agriculture, an area in which Ohlendorf took issue with National Socialist ideology. For supporters of biodynamics, the use of innovative technology was good for the German economy. But using technology in this process and industrializing it would further taint the soil. The Nazi economy was geared to the promotion of big industry rather than the protection of small-scale experiments, such as biodynamic farming. What Ohlendorf supported, “handicraft livelihoods of the *Mittelstand*, “could not survive in an economy based heavily on the accumulation of war materials.¹⁹⁷ He sought to protect the small producers, but could not do so because of his “adherence to the mystical biodynamic farming practices of Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophy.”¹⁹⁸ Anthroposophy became a hindrance for him as the Nazi party not only continued to distance itself from Steiner’s beliefs, but also pressured Ohlendorf to dissociate himself from the group. If he had not agreed to quiet his association with Anthroposophy, he might have jeopardized his career.

Ohlendorf was unimpressed with the manner in which the Nazis practiced their economic strategies, and disapproved of their dismissal of practical biodynamic farming. He constantly had to explain his relationship with the Anthroposophical society, defending elements of their philosophy, such as

¹⁹⁷ William Oliver Coleman, *Economics and its Enemies: Two Centuries of Anti-Economics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 88.

¹⁹⁸ Coleman, *Economics and its Enemies*, 255, and footnote 34.

biodynamics, to the Reich. His views were overruled, and German rearmament became completely industrialized. However, Germany did not have sufficient funds to sustain a war, genocide, and the Third Reich's thousand-year reign. In a different place and time, Ohlendorf's conviction that the economy should be slowly built at a grass-roots level, might have proven to be right. But again, the Nazi party's power prevailed, and Ohlendorf, at least temporarily, submitted to the war machine-driven economy.

Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA)

As the outbreak of World War II approached, Heydrich reconsidered Ohlendorf's role in the Nazi government. The RSHA was redesigned to incorporate elements of the already existing SD, SS, Gestapo, and other independent Nazi government organizations into one larger Reich Security Main Office. Prior to the establishment of the RSHA, the SS and SD, under Himmler's order and direction, were the primary agencies conducting intelligence in the Reich. As the war drew near, and Germany had blatantly violated rearmaments provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, it was believed that wartime success would be dependent on consolidating intelligence and police groups under a single governmental agency. As leader of the newly-formed RSHA, Heydrich carefully selected appointees to head the divisions. When it came to filling the AMT III directorship, he reluctantly turned back to Ohlendorf, who was still serving the SD in his "volunteer" capacity. As head of AMT III (German-settled areas), Ohlendorf conducted all public opinion research in Germany. Ohlendorf held this position from September 1939-June 1941, and then

again from June 1942-May 1945. The gap from June 1941-June 1942 represents the time in which Ohlendorf was transferred and assigned to the Russian front. He became commander of *Einsatzgruppe D*, and under his leadership, 91,678 victims were murdered.¹⁹⁹

The nature of the duties of the RSHA is peculiar. Wildt argues that it was an improvised agency that was not solely a police institution, fusing together the SS and Gestapo, but more importantly, was a tangible representation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, or people's community. Combining the ideology of the *Volk*, the state, and racial supremacy made the RSHA into an administrative representation of the people. Every aspect of the RSHA was designed to be one component of the greater Nazi "worldview expressed in the 'will of the Führer.'"²⁰⁰ In this worldview, Adolf Eichmann was employed as a specialist in Jewish deportation in the RSHA.²⁰¹ This shows increased Nazi urgency in systematically dealing with the Jews as a whole. It is also clear how the *Einsatzgruppen* grew out of the administration, and how effortlessly one branch of the RSHA could be expanded or adapted. This is

¹⁹⁹ CSDIC (UK), Appendix I, "PW's Career" timeline, 30 September, 1945.

²⁰⁰ Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, 9. Wildt explores the origins of the RSHA in painstaking detail, outlining each office, group, and section of the structure formed, and notes how the incorporation date, September 27, 1939, perfectly coincides with the beginning of World War II. His most significant argument centers around how the vast majority of the leaders of the RSHA were of the same upbringing, same type of educational backgrounds and how the Reich office leaders evolved from doing intelligence/desk work to killers in the *Einsatzgruppen*. For Ohlendorf's statements in British custody concerning the most detailed outline of the organizational structure of the RSHA, see CSDIC (UK), S.I.R. 1706, dated 30 Sep. 45, "AMT III (SD INLAND) RSHA.

²⁰¹ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945: The Years of Extermination* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 34-35.

most evident in the establishment of the *Einsatzgruppen* and, in particular, how in 1941 Ohlendorf was transferred to the front while under the umbrella of the RSHA and SS, i.e. Heydrich and Himmler.

The RSHA was a flexible institution grounded in, first and foremost, National Socialist ideology. For Wildt, the organization and its leaders had to adapt to expanding tasks and changing political situations, so as to be able to enforce the “greatest possible influence” in Germany.²⁰² The war provided the opportunity for the RSHA to implement any policy it wished, initially demonstrated with the invasion of Poland. Here the RSHA was more than an intelligence-gathering and assessment organization, as Nazi racial ideology became government policy. In Poland, the *Einsatzgruppen*, a new division controlled by the RSHA, eliminated political opponents and instituted racial policy on a large scale.²⁰³ This aspect will be revisited in a later section on the inception of the *Einsatzgruppen* and Ohlendorf’s transfer to the Russian war in 1941. Most importantly, the flexibility of the RSHA was demonstrated in how its leaders were allowed to independently enact policies.

Regarding the persecution of the Jews, Wildt argues that the National Socialist regime wanted “politically dedicated men like Ohlendorf,” not subordinate bureaucrats, to implement extermination policies.²⁰⁴ The Reich believed that Nazi ideologues were vital; men such as Ohlendorf who would implement and defend not

²⁰² Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, 11.

²⁰³ Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, 11-17.

²⁰⁴ Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, 18.

only the so-called Final Solution, but who could also perfectly align it with other Nazi rhetoric. This ability is likely what drove and sustained Ohlendorf's career. Wildt fights against Goldhagen's argument for "eliminationist anti-Semitism" inherent in these particular leaders, saying that there is no evidence in the early lives of these men to support this claim.²⁰⁵ Wildt instead emphasizes that the RSHA leaders were bred in specific economic and political conditions in the interwar period. They grew up resenting the treatment of Germany, and thus made careers out of trying to make their country thrive again.

Why was Ohlendorf chosen for the RSHA if he and Heydrich had already disagreed on a number of issues, leading to Ohlendorf's suspension from the SD? Heinz Höhne put it simply; Himmler "clung to Ohlendorf," fearing backlash from the party, and Heydrich held onto him for his "expertise."²⁰⁶ While employed as a lecturer with the universities and with the National Trade union, Ohlendorf had won the favor of trade unions and those opposed to large corporate wealth in Germany. Hanno Sowade argued that one particular reason for keeping Ohlendorf involved in the unions was the "lack of economic experts in the SS."²⁰⁷ This is a recurring theme in the historiography: the Nazi quest for building a legitimate government through the hiring of "experts" in their respective fields. By this time, Ohlendorf had made himself an expert in economics, and his work experience overrode the lack of an

²⁰⁵ Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation* 10.

²⁰⁶ Höhne, *Death's Head*, 237.

²⁰⁷ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 157.

official degree in the field of economics. His resumé included working with Jessen on political science and economics, and in the National Trade Group. Thus, he became a practicing economist with practical National Socialist economic theories. Although he never actually attained a degree in economics, the RSHA viewed Ohlendorf as an expert in economics and trade, based on his advanced degree in jurisprudence and experience teaching economics. Sowade argued that Ohlendorf was significant in trade groups and unions and among the middle class because of his broad-based economic theories, saying “it was remarkable” that he held three offices concurrently: RSHA, *Reichsgruppe Handel*, and the economics administration.²⁰⁸ Even for an *Alter Kämpfer*, this was extraordinary.

Despite what Heydrich and other party members thought of Ohlendorf’s demeanor and persona, he brought a much-needed expertise to the newly established and ideologically driven RSHA. As the larger picture unfolded, Ohlendorf was the ideal candidate for leader of AMT III, especially since the new division was derived from his office, *SD Hauptamt Zentralableitung II*.²⁰⁹ His ruthless honesty and careerist drive proved extremely beneficial to the Reich: He provided reports that were highly objective by his standards, gathered intelligence, and ensured the accuracy of his data to the point of being hyper-critical of all things related to the Reich. About this transition, Ohlendorf said “as the Reichsführer-SS [Himmler] did not intend to develop the...[SD] intelligence service...the solution of an external

²⁰⁸ Sowade, “Otto Ohlendorf,” 157.

²⁰⁹ Höhne, *Death’s Head*, 256.

façade was sufficient.”²¹⁰ While this statement was made in retrospect, at the time, Ohlendorf really believed he was making a difference, and helping the German people with the reports and thus, helping the Nazi party prosper.

The Reports: Meldungen aus dem Reich

RSHA, AMT III (SD-Inland) was designed to produce honest and nonbiased accounts of opinions in the Reich. The conundrum Ohlendorf had was that Himmler forbade him from investigating the Party itself, while at the same time, expecting him to cover all “spheres of life.”²¹¹ Ohlendorf sent agents out to conduct secret polls, accruing data from all realms and areas of society. He assured Himmler and other Reich officials that his “greatest worry” would be to have the German people believe the Party was something “negative or hostile,” or to portray Hitler and the SS as anything other than a helpful extension of the Volk.²¹²

The reports themselves were quite simple in format, such as statistical data based on material collected on life in wartime Germany. Each report began with a summary of the event, and stated basic public reactions to it. The writing style was factual and “humorless,” providing figures and individual examples of how things like transportation issues affected someone’s everyday life.²¹³ At the conclusion of a

²¹⁰ TWC, Ohlendorf Testimony, 8 Oct. 1947, 232-233.

²¹¹ Höhne, *Death’s Head*, 423-424.

²¹² Höhne, *Death’s Head*, 423 and Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, op cit, p. xviii.

²¹³ Smith, “Colonel Ohlendorf,” 3.

particular report, there were recommendations provided, such as “therefore, it is suggested...;” “the matter is still under consideration;” and “Police have been informed.”²¹⁴ Each report contained a summary of the problem or issue, an assessment of its importance, and why it should be addressed by the Reich. The process of data collection was explained to Felix Kersten; “of course we have our confidential agents everywhere...but they’re not employees who denounce the head of their firm...they report to us how the situation stands in every field and don’t get a penny for doing it.”²¹⁵ Ohlendorf made sure to note these ‘volunteers’ were properly screened, and any statistical data that seemed unreliable was dismissed along with the agent.²¹⁶ Specific instructions were given to the secret agents, that they were to report on public reaction to particular policies and events such as the invasion of the USSR, food rationing, fall of France, etc.²¹⁷

Arthur L. Smith’s “Life in Wartime Germany: Colonel Ohlendorf’s Opinion Service” described the scenario of hands-on information collection. According to Smith, in certain areas of Germany, a number of volunteers were sent to gather data (questions and topics chosen by Ohlendorf and his team of experts) by “listening in his own circle of friends, family, and business associates.” The agents were glorified

²¹⁴ Smith, “Colonel Ohlendorf,” 3 and *Guides to German Records Microfilmed at Alexandria, VA.*, Washington, D.C., National Archives, 1963, No. 39, Records of the Reich Leader of the SS and Chief of the German Police, Part III, 43-44.

²¹⁵ Kersten, *Memoirs*, 213, and Smith, “Colonel Ohlendorf,” 2.

²¹⁶ Kersten, *Memoirs*, 213, and Smith, “Colonel Ohlendorf,” 2.

²¹⁷ Smith, “Colonel Ohlendorf,” 2-3.

eaves-droppers who went to public places and gathered information from schools, churches, clubs and the *Hitlerjugend*.²¹⁸ Ohlendorf gave “special attention” to rumor control, such as those surrounding the 1939 assassination attempt on Hitler’s life, but Smith argued that the Goebbels propaganda machine often planted rumors preceding a new Reich policy, to test public reaction before it was implemented.²¹⁹ This made Ohlendorf’s opinion service and data collection all the more important, as his reports showed how the propaganda machine was failing to appropriately convey messages. For instance, public reaction to newspaper articles planted by Goebbels often led to having to those papers having to issue apologies for offending certain groups in the population. Since newspapers were forbidden to publish crime statistics, Ohlendorf’s reports served as the only means for gathering statistical data on criminal acts.²²⁰ The reports were successful in that they exhaustively documented dissent and public opinion in Nazi Germany. However, for Ohlendorf, as the war drew near and began, the material became increasingly depressing, showing the lack of public support for the Nazi Party.

Ohlendorf’s steadfast devotion to true National Socialism made him appear to his colleagues and superiors as “the archetype of the schizophrenic SS intellectual,” an obedient Nazi careerist who, as *Gralshüter* of National Socialism,

²¹⁸ Smith, “Colonel Ohlendorf,” 3, and Marlis Steinert, *Hitlers Krieg und die Deutschen* (Düsseldorf: Econ Verlag, 1970), op cit., pp. 44-45.

²¹⁹ Smith, “Colonel Ohlendorf,” 4.

²²⁰ Smith, “Colonel Ohlendorf,” 5.

unabashedly hoped the Party would fail.²²¹ Much like Ohlendorf's dream of having a true opinion service in the SD, his RSHA reports on the Reich were met with hostile criticism. As he delved deeper, investigating the so-called "spheres of life," Ohlendorf, "the puritan", discovered so many problems and mutilations in the Nazi system that his utopian faith and belief in National Socialism was destroyed. He even went so far as to say the Party was dying from cancer.²²²

Naturally, Ohlendorf's enthusiasm for the National Socialist cause began to dwindle, not without notice from Himmler. Felix Kersten, Himmler's personal physician, recalled a conversation about Ohlendorf with Himmler saying "I hope you'll be able to help him; he has trouble with his liver and gall-bladder. His reports are always gloomy; he has the pessimistic outlook which goes with physical suffering...I don't care for the man...he has no sense of humor..."²²³ Himmler was oblivious to the fact that perhaps the results from the polling and reports made Ohlendorf feel hopeless and grim. He saw Ohlendorf as a "school master watching over me," rather than a devoted Reich official who gathered intelligence that revealed that the people were turning against his Party. As the war intensified and victory was no longer assured, the reports increasingly began to focus on criticizing the Goebbels propaganda machine. The German people suffered from the usual wartime problems like depreciated currency, scarcity of food items and fuel, and

²²¹ Höhne, *Death's Head*, 422.

²²² Höhne, *Death's Head*, 424.

²²³ Kersten, *Memoirs*, 215, conversation with Himmler dated 18 September, 1943, and Höhne, 424.

shortages of all types of products, which created a depressed Volk.²²⁴ A report dated 20 April 1944 stated “...desire for a rapid end to the war is everywhere very great.”²²⁵

Disagreements with specific Party officials like Himmler escalated as the war continued. In his testimony at Nuremberg, Ohlendorf recalled Himmler referring to him as a “humorless Prussian,” and by 1942, Goebbels, Bormann, and Hans Frank all questioned the accuracy, viability, and need for the reports in the Reich.²²⁶ However, none of Ohlendorf’s personal Party feuds or open criticism of the SD reports ever led to his dismissal from the SS, although according to Höhne, Himmler threatened to have Ohlendorf arrested several times.²²⁷ This is probably because Ohlendorf was a valuable asset to the Reich, a respected *Alter Kämpfer* who conducted public opinion reports concerning what the German people thought about each topic. It was in the best interest of the Reich to address these concerns. Additionally, Ohlendorf’s work with the National Trade Union and *Reichsgruppe Handel* won him the favor of his peers. However, Himmler refused to show Hitler the reports, saying “they would only impair the Führer’s capacity for action,” and often, they were returned to Ohlendorf edited and virtually useless.²²⁸ Despite Party

²²⁴ Smith, “Colonel Ohlendorf,” 6.

²²⁵ Boberach, *Meldungen*, op cit., p. 503, and Höhne, *Death’s Head*, 510.

²²⁶ Höhne, *Death’s Head*, 424-425, Sowade, “Otto Ohlendorf,” 158, note here that Hans Frank was the Gauleiter of occupied Poland and dismissed the SD reports.

²²⁷ Höhne, *Death’s Head*, 426.

²²⁸ Höhne, *Death’s Head*, 426-427, and Kersten, *Memoirs*, 216.

conflict, criticism of the reports, and remarks about Ohlendorf's character, his career flourished, and he rose ever higher, earning choice promotions and decorations. Again, the fact that Himmler clearly disliked him had no great bearing on his career. Although this is a contradiction, it must be included to better understand why Ohlendorf's professional success was so extensive. First and foremost, he was a committed, dedicated *Alter Kämpfer* of Nazi ideology, which bound him to his career, the Party, and to Germany. It is also likely what contributed most to his unexpected transfer to the *Einsatzgruppen*.

By the summer of 1943, and a year removed from his service in the *Einsatzgruppen*, Ohlendorf's SD reports were finally restricted, and by 1944, completely banned, with the exception of a special report on the 20 July assassination attempt.²²⁹ Ohlendorf was enraged and told Kersten that Himmler "wants to know the names of the men who drew up the report of those who made unpleasant remarks, so that he can hold them responsible."²³⁰ Ohlendorf went on to say "I don't think there's another intelligence service in the world which has such a hard time as we have, constantly at loggerheads with our own chief and endangering our own existence simply because we insist on making objective reports."²³¹ Ohlendorf's reaction was true to his character and temperament:

²²⁹ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 161. David Kitermann argued that the reports on the 20 July assassination attempt were all read by Hitler himself. See David Kitermann, "National Diary of German Civilian Life During 1940: The SD Reports," (Doctoral Thesis, University of Washington, 1972), 36-37.

²³⁰ Kersten, *Memoirs*, 211, conversation with Ohlendorf, 4th September, 1943.

²³¹ Kersten, *Memoirs*, 212, conversation with Ohlendorf, 4th September, 1943.

insisting his beliefs superseded everyone else's, trying to prove himself to anyone who would listen. In this case, Ohlendorf's outrage at Himmler's termination of the opinion service is justified. Himmler believed that since the reports became increasingly grim and depressing, there was no need to bother to show them to Hitler. He personally could not understand the point of the reports anyway.²³² In a conversation with Felix Kersten, Himmler said of Ohlendorf and the reports:

His pet idea is that I should let the Führer see his reports. But they're usually so pessimistic that this is quite out of the question; they would only impair the Führer's capacity for action...Details which are unhelpful must be kept from the Führer, however important they may appear. His task is to lead us to victory; I must keep him from anything which might interfere with this task, even if Herr Ohlendorf does not share this view. But if you'll only restore Ohlendorf to health and strengthen his nervous system, he'll soon be looking at the world through different eyes.²³³

Himmler's approval of the reports was completely dependent on whether or not Ohlendorf, and his spies, were reporting progress within the Reich. As the duration of the war increased and Germany's chance to win diminished, dissent heightened in the Reich, as seen in the reports. Himmler's personal differences with Ohlendorf could not allow the reporting to continue, to the point where he suggested that Ohlendorf needed medical treatment. To Himmler's conversation above, Ohlendorf responded in kind to Kersten saying "...tell the Reichsführer that your treatment is having its effect, my nerves are improving and my pessimism vanishing. Then perhaps he will take my reports more seriously."²³⁴ He and his staff not only recorded reactions to current events, but tried to "chart significant trends" which

²³² Smith, "Colonel Ohlendorf," 6-7.

²³³ Kersten, *Memoirs*, 215-216, conversation with Himmler, 18th September, 1943.

²³⁴ Kersten, *Memoirs*, 217-218, conversation with Ohlendorf, 24th September, 1943.

are evident in the *Meldungen*.²³⁵ Unfortunately, Himmler no longer wanted the reports to continue because, in his mind, they were useless; the reporting was stopped in 1944.

In retrospect, the reports demonstrate general German discontent with the war, a lack of belief in victory, and after the failed invasion of the Soviet Union, a push to make peace.²³⁶ Despite this, and to combat the pessimism of the reports, Ohlendorf said "...I'm always trying to make the consequences of..." not running a proper dictatorship ... "clear to the Reichsführer, especially to point out to him its devastating effects in war-time...What I'm trying to do is to foresee...future consequences."²³⁷ He wholeheartedly believed the opinion reports could change Germany for the better, and could not understand why Himmler cast them aside. Ohlendorf's frustration was justified, as the reports were not significant to the Reich leaders during the Second World War. Despite regular SD reports continuing to brief the leadership on general topics until the end of the war, such as "*Stimmung und Haltung der Arbeiterschaft*" (Mood and Attitude of the Workforce), on July 13, 1944, the last official public opinion report was issued.²³⁸

²³⁵ Smith, "Colonel Ohlendorf," 7.

²³⁶ Smith, "Colonel Ohlendorf," 7, Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, op cit., p. 8.

²³⁷ Kersten, *Memoirs*, 217, conversation with Ohlendorf, 24th September, 1943.

²³⁸ Kitermann, "National Diary," 37 and 35-37. Kitermann also notes that the 20 July edition was printed with special permission from Himmler, but the week prior was the last time one of Ohlendorf's *Meldungen* was issued.

The End of the Reich

After Ohlendorf returned from his transfer to the Soviet front as leader of *Einsatzgruppe D*, he resumed his administrative duties as head of RSHA AMT III. He continued with the SD reports, but the unfavorable light cast on the Reich through public opinion polling was too much for Himmler to face. However, Ohlendorf did not exclusively focus his careerist ambitions on the RSHA. Following his *Einsatzgruppen* duties, representatives from the Ministry of Economics attempted to “win Ohlendorf for the ministry” because his economic policies opposed Speer’s, and favored the small business community.²³⁹ This initially failed, but in 1943, Ohlendorf became director of the Ministry and deputy to Secretary of State, Dr. Franz Hayler. Hayler’s health had been failing, and the Ministry was faltering under the leadership of Walther Funk. Ohlendorf provided a beneficial solution to the stress the war had placed on the economy by creating a “think tank” to try and solve problems of rationing, and attempting to restore economic order.

While working for the Ministry of Economics, Ohlendorf began to think about the post-war economic state of Germany. He assumed the role of “mediator and coordinator” in industrial sectors, and sought to negotiate a transition plan from war-time production to post-war recovery. He utilized his RSHA position to draft plans under which individual corporations amassing conspicuous wealth would cease to exist, and state control over the economy would be decreased. He hoped these changes would lead to more equitable distribution of wealth in Germany.

²³⁹ Sowade, “Otto Ohlendorf,” 161.

Hanno Sowade further argued that Ohlendorf's post-*Einsatzgruppen* economic policies were so significant that they carried over into the work of future Chancellor of the Federal Republic of West Germany, Ludwig Erhard, whose initial ideas were brought to Ohlendorf in 1944.²⁴⁰ Ohlendorf's efforts to create a sound economic future for Germany were hastened, yet failed to become a reality because of the impending end to the war. Needless to say, post-war plans and the possibility of the Reich losing the war could not be mentioned in public.

Looking back on Ohlendorf's career, his rise in the Nazi Party was nothing short of meteoric, despite personal conflict with high-ranking officials like Himmler and Heydrich. This is extraordinary, even in the context of his *Alter Kämpfer* status. Käthe Ohlendorf said of her husband in the last years of his career, he "worked with an ardent dedication... [and achieved] growing recognition."²⁴¹ Here is the list of promotions Ohlendorf received throughout his career and the western military equivalent:

²⁴⁰ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 161-162. Erhard developed the ideas that became the basis of the modern German economy, a system based on a social market economy, focusing on competitive production. He was the second Chancellor of West Germany and the First Minister of Economics of the Federal Republic. Ohlendorf knew of Erhard as a Nazi-era, up and coming student of economics, and in 1944, they briefly corresponded about post-war economics. Erhard's biographer, Alfred Mierzejewski argues that Ohlendorf's late Reich economic policies heavily influenced Erhard's policies in the years after the Second World War. For more information on Erhard, see Alfred Mierzejewski, *Ludwig Erhard: A Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 22.

²⁴¹ Käthe Ohlendorf, *Letter to David Irving*.

Date	Rank	American Military Equivalent
1936 (9 Nov)	<i>SS-Hauptsturmführer</i>	Captain
1937 (20 Apr)	<i>SS-Sturmbannführer</i>	Major
1938 (9 Nov)	<i>SS-Obersturmbannführer</i>	Lieutenant Colonel
1940 (1 Jan)	<i>SS-Standartenführer</i>	Colonel
1941 (5 Oct)	<i>SS-Oberführer</i>	Senior Colonel
1942 (16 Jun)	<i>SS-Brigadeführer</i>	Brigadier General
1944 (9 Nov)	<i>SS-Gruppenführer</i>	Major General ²⁴²

He began his career as a Captain and ended as a Major General, an impressive and somewhat unusual series of promotions received in a relatively short period of time.

During WWII, German officials were subjected to yearly work assessments, in much the same way as the modern American military. Looking at Ohlendorf's promotions, there are consistencies in praise and evaluation of his work ethic, despite personal issues with Himmler.²⁴³ In October 1941, he was promoted by Heydrich from *SS-Standartenführer* to *Oberführer*, and it specifically states "Der Reichsführer hat mundlich zugestimmt," meaning Himmler has "orally agreed."

²⁴² Although this chart has been created to demonstrate Ohlendorf's promotion series and the American title equivalents, the promotion list comes directly from the Berlin *Bundesarchiv*, Nachlaß, Personal-Akte, Ohlendorf, Otto, SS-Nr. 880 (microfilm) page 861. Also, often Ohlendorf is mentioned as *SS-Obergruppenführer* at the time of his surrender. According to his personnel file, this is untrue. However, there may not be a perfect equivalency to the western-style military ranking system. See also *Guides to German Records Microfilmed at Alexandria, VA.*, Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, 1981, No. 79, "Records of the Waffen-SS," Part II, p. vii.

²⁴³ For a complete list of promotions, see Berlin *Bundesarchiv*, Nachlaß, Personal-Akte Ohlendorf, Otto, SS-nr. 880 (microfilm), index.

Because of his service in the east, as the leader of *Einsatzgruppe D*, Ohlendorf received the service cross first class with distinction with swords, the *Ostmedaille*, and other awards from the Wehrmacht including a Romanian decoration.²⁴⁴ For the work he did in the Reich, he was promoted yearly, and in the one particular recommendation for his promotion to *SS-Gruppenführer*, it reads congratulations for the “exceptional work with the SS economic policy.”²⁴⁵ He was also given the title “*Generalleutenant der Polizei*” in December, specifically for his service in Russia and as the head of RSHA AMT III.²⁴⁶ Without detailing each of Ohlendorf’s evaluations here, it is clear that his transfer to the *Einsatzgruppen* tremendously assisted his career, securing him a promotion to the SS equivalent of General.

In late April 1945, as the Allies and Soviets closed in on Germany, Ohlendorf, devoted Nazi to the end, was prepared for Germany’s surrender. Ohlendorf had been planning for post-war economic recovery for several years, and at the time of the surrender, he was in the elite group of Nazi officials who, for a short period of time, were governed by Admiral Karl Dönitz. In light of the news of Hitler’s and Goebbels’ suicides, and the disappearance of Bormann and Eichmann, along with many other Reich officials, Ohlendorf stayed with Himmler as they fled to Flensburg, on the Danish border. On May 7th, 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ Berlin *Bundesarchiv*, Nachlaß, Personal-Akte Ohlendorf, Otto, SS-nr. 880 (microfilm) pages 885 and 881 for the *Ostmedaille*, also called the “Medaille Winterschlacht im Osten 1941/42.” For the Romanian campaign award, see (microfilm) page 909, he had to attain special permission to receive the award.

²⁴⁵ Berlin *Bundesarchiv*, Nachlaß (microfilm) page 879.

²⁴⁶ Berlin *Bundesarchiv*, Nachlaß (microfilm) pages 888-891.

He now had to strategize his own surrender because the possibility of capture by the Soviets was unthinkable to the Germans. At the time of the surrender, Ohlendorf was planning a new “public opinion service” for a new occupied Germany.²⁴⁸ Hilary Earl describes the circumstances of his surrender as completely “delusional.” He actually thought he could get a job in occupied Germany in exchange for helping the Allies. She does point out that he knew he would be extremely useful as a high-ranking Nazi official who ran an intelligence department. However, his arrogance clouded his judgment, obscuring from consciousness the significance of his association with a criminal organization. He seriously believed the Allies would implement his post-war plans.²⁴⁹

In Himmler’s attempted flight to Bavaria, he shaved off his signature moustache, donned an eye patch, and with the appropriately forged documents, smuggled himself into a refugee/POW camp. Yet, he identified himself properly at the interrogation center in Lüneberg, and while in British custody, Himmler ingested cyanide and died shortly thereafter; he was buried in an unmarked grave.²⁵⁰ Ohlendorf alleged that he was asked to accompany Himmler on his flight

²⁴⁷ Note here that May 7th and May 8th, 1945 are both used to mark the date of the surrender. Both are correct as Alfred Jodl, General of the Army, signed the document on the 7th, and it was announced publicly and initiated on the 8th. For instance, Earl cites May 8th, but Höhne cited May 7th.

²⁴⁸ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 49.

²⁴⁹ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 49-51.

²⁵⁰ Rhodes, *Masters of Death*, 272. There are numerous accounts of Himmler’s flight and suicide.

from Flensburg but refused, staying true to the Nazi Party until the end. According to Käthe Ohlendorf, her husband saw Himmler's flight as an act of cowardice, and said he asked Himmler to take responsibility for his actions and stay in Flensburg "as he had always assumed he would," but instead he committed suicide.²⁵¹

Ohlendorf and the rest of the Dönitz government housed in Flensburg were each given cyanide, in case of capture by the Soviets.

The most interesting part of analyzing Ohlendorf's motivations for surrender is that it never appears to have crossed his mind that his *Einsatzgruppen* activities were of any interest whatsoever to the Allies. This was his most fatal mistake. Had he objectively viewed his career, as a captor or lawyer would have, Ohlendorf should have seen that the *Einsatzgruppen* years would be viewed as a form of criminal activity. Instead, his overconfident demeanor, clouded by careerist zeal, created a problem in Ohlendorf's master plan of surrender to the Allies. It had not occurred to him that the future would bring a war crimes trial whereby he was the chief defendant.

Conclusion

Piecing together, analyzing, and reflecting upon Otto Ohlendorf's career in a complete form shows that although the Third Reich is usually portrayed as a totalitarian dictatorship, there was room for criticism. There is no question that National Socialist ideology, practice, and philosophy were intertwined and ingrained in the German people with the creation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and Ohlendorf was

²⁵¹ Käthe Ohlendorf, *Letter to David Irving*.

no exception to this. Although he was a proud proponent of Nazi ideology, he diverged from Nazi party belief in the practical application of National Socialist ideology in realms of the economy and public opinion. He believed more strongly in the Nazi utopia than anyone, which led to consistent disappointment when his ideas were cast aside in favor of bureaucracy, big industry, and the war.

Another issue raised in this document is that of academic legitimacy in the Reich, and the high value the Nazi party placed on their government hiring individuals with advanced degrees. The interchangeability of Ohlendorf's degree in law with economics offers an interesting look into how the Nazi party incorporated these particular fields of study together in their ideology. The Reich wanted people who could and would implement their policies. Some knowledge of the subject area was needed, but they did not require conventional experts. Above all, they valued loyalty, and whatever Ohlendorf's level of expertise was, it was overridden by his status as an *Alter Kämpfer*. Despite learning and analyzing how Ohlendorf so easily moved from law to economics, it is still staggering to see how he rose through the ranks in the Reich, and was recognized as an expert on a variety of subjects. Calling Ohlendorf's intelligence into question is not useful, unless tied into the entire portrayal of his personality and character. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that Ohlendorf represented a devoted National Socialist ideologue, which is visibly demonstrated in his promotions and ranks. His success was defined in terms of his identity as an *Alter Kämpfer*, his personality, and his level of education.

Historians have focused much effort on exploring the strained relationship between Ohlendorf and leaders like Himmler and Heydrich. Their analyses provide

insight into professional and personal relationships among Nazi officials. Unlike some of what was said, especially from the trial, about Ohlendorf merely being stubborn and egomaniacal, this dissertation aims to incorporate Ohlendorf's dedication to National Socialism and *Alter Kämpfer* loyalty into the discussion. Ohlendorf's devotion to a variation of Nazism centered on the common man not only drove his career. He used it to justify his actions in the Holocaust to himself, the Nazi party, and when on trial.

Why did Ohlendorf fail to maintain a career in academia, something he openly strove to achieve? The explanation may lie in his personality. He was described as a know-it-all whose frank, deliberate, and abrupt nature may have steered him into trouble, evidenced by the unclear conditions under which he moved from Kiel to Berlin with Jessen. However, there may be a simpler explanation. Ohlendorf wanted to be an agent of change of National Socialism, and the place he could affect the most change, he believed, was in the SD first, and then the RSHA. When he came to work with the SD, he was unable to leave for two reasons: The Nazi party valued Ohlendorf's ability to provide expertise and the implementation of policy, and secondly, he believed he could best serve the aims of National Socialism as a public servant. Despite his effort to decline his transfer to the *Einsatzgruppen*, ultimately this drew him into the mass murder of more than 90,000 people. For Ohlendorf, reconciling right from wrong was not an issue; to question any alleged order to kill would have been to question his dedication to and belief in National Socialist philosophy. Although this part of his career, that of front line perpetrator, was one he certainly did not enjoy, he believed the Nazi propaganda

that the Jews and partisans of Europe must be eliminated in order to have a thriving Aryan race.

Upon his return from the *Einsatzgruppen*, Ohlendorf devoted immense effort to help the Nazis retain control of Germany, despite his open pessimism about the potential for a German victory. He was correct, and more importantly, prepared. After six years in captivity and being found guilty on three counts of war crimes, Ohlendorf was executed, still fully devoted to his belief in National Socialism.

Chapter 4:

The *Einsatzgruppen*: Otto Ohlendorf's "Unexpected" Career Path

In June 1941, Otto Ohlendorf was appointed commander of *Einsatzgruppe D*, a mobile killing unit attached to the 11th Army (Wehrmacht) assigned to the Ukraine and Crimean territory. Under the leadership of Reinhard Heydrich, Ohlendorf assumed this new leadership role and held the title "Commissioner of the Chief of the Security Police and the SD attached to the 11th Army".²⁵² Here, for ten months, Ohlendorf commanded and enforced the murder of 91,000 Jews and partisans. There are differing opinions as to why Ohlendorf received this particular assignment, as he was one of the educated, high-ranking Nazi officials in charge of AMT III- SD Inland, or national intelligence service. The unpopularity of the previously mentioned public opinion reports, his affiliation with the Anthroposophical society, general brutal honesty, steadfast opinionated character, and personal criticism of Nazi colleagues are all reasons that contributed to the transfer. Each of these motives alone seem more than sufficient to warrant the

²⁵² Käthe Ohlendorf *Letter to David Irving*. This letter is digitally accessible through the archive repository website and was written to David Irving as a plea to get her husband's "testimonial" published. A known Nazi sympathizer and Holocaust denier, Irving was referred to Mrs. Ohlendorf to inquire about getting the "truth" about his life and the trials published. She outlines misrepresentations of Ohlendorf and mutual acquaintances she and Irving have, in addition to several historians with which she was in contact. She speaks of documents and photos to prove her husband was treated unfairly, but those documents are not presently accessible. Ohlendorf's reluctance is noted several times in his testimony and affidavits, given in captivity with the British and American forces. TWC, O. Ohlendorf's testimony, January 3, 1946, page 314 states as the official *Einsatzgruppe D* leadership title and duration: "From June 1941 to the death of Heydrich in June 1942, I led *Einsatzgruppe D*, and was the representative of the Chief of the Sipo and the SD with the 11th Army."

reassignment. Although Ohlendorf appealed the transfer process, he assumed responsibility of *Einsatzgruppe D*, embarked on a six-week military training process, and performed his leadership role in much the same way as every other governmental and academic position he held previously: with dynamism and excellence.²⁵³ However, in this case, the major difference was that the job entailed being directly responsible for enacting military and governmental commands to perform massive population liquidations.

This dissertation not only outlines the genocidal actions of Otto Ohlendorf as leader of *Einsatzgruppe D*, but attempts to create a narrative of how and why he was reassigned, as well as exploring from whom directives were initiated, how murder was enacted, how his *Einsatzgruppen* were affected (according to testimony), and how his leadership ended. This discussion raises questions about several curious circumstances of Ohlendorf's involvement in the *Einsatzgruppen*, as well as his career motivations. Previous points in this paper point to significant factors of motivation, including Ohlendorf's zealous careerism, his anti-Semitic beliefs, and his dedicated utopian radicalism. This chapter focuses on underlying issues addressing how and why Ohlendorf was transferred, how his commitment to National Socialism shaped his leadership of *Einsatzgruppe D*, and how his status as an *Alter Kämpfer* influenced his career path.

²⁵³ Käthe Ohlendorf's letter to D. Irving describes two separate appeals processes with "exemptions". See also, Mario Dederichs *Heydrich: The Face of Evil* (Munich: Piper Verlag GmbH, 2005), 96. See also, TWC, Ohlendorf Testimony, January 3, 1946, 314-315 and testimony, Ohlendorf, October 8, 1947, roll 2, 513-514. Here Ohlendorf is less clear about the actual number of times he appealed the process.

The Transfer

The difficulty Ohlendorf posed for the Reich with his public opinion reports (*Meldungen aus Dem Reich*), is well known, as they displayed to the highest Nazi officials an unwanted, unflattering, and unfavorable review of their performance, rated by the German populace.²⁵⁴ Popular criticism was expressed regarding leadership styles, war-mongering, economic issues, policies in the east, and character evaluations. According to his testimony, Ohlendorf claimed he was repeatedly reprimanded (for continuing with the fault-finding reports), and felt he was sent to the *Einsatzgruppen* as a punishment. However, because he was an *Alter Kämpfer*, Himmler and Heydrich needed a devout loyalist they could trust to perform the duties of leading the *Einsatzgruppen*. But, Ohlendorf and other *Einsatzgruppen* leaders claimed *Blutkitt* (the bond of blood) in defense of their collective responsibility in committing genocide. According to Michael Dudley and Fran Gale, *Blutkitt* is the “collective commission of crimes contrary to one’s personal values, confirmed extraordinary service in the greater cause, or sacred mission, proving and reinforcing party allegiance and loyalty.”²⁵⁵ In other words, *Blutkitt* was the sacrifice a Nazi careerist like Ohlendorf was expected to make. Since he was an “old fighter” in the Party, he was most likely expected to willingly assume this

²⁵⁴ For the full report, in 17 volumes, see Heinz Boberach (ed.), *Meldungen aus Dem Reich*.

²⁵⁵ Michael Dudley and Fran Gale, “Genocide and the Healing Professions”, in *Genocide Perspectives IV: Essays on the Holocaust and Genocide*, Colin Tatz, ed. (Sydney: UTSe Press, 2012), 96.

role. Yet because he *was* an *Alter Kämpfer*, he probably could have refused the transfer and been reprimanded only slightly. Although Ohlendorf's career had not prepared him to be a mass murderer *per se*, he claimed that Party allegiance overrode his ability to decline his transfer. At the same time, Ohlendorf's anti-Semitic beliefs should not be discounted, as he was a true believer in National Socialism. However, his careerist motivation was the most significant driving force in taking the leadership role of the *Einsatzgruppen*. Psychiatrist and scholar Leo Alexander described *Blutkitt* as "an age-old method used by criminal gangs everywhere: that by making suspects of disloyalty clear themselves by participating in a crime that would definitely and irrevocably tie them to the organization."²⁵⁶ Essentially, this suggests that the Nazis demanded that Germans implicate themselves in crimes so that they could not escape association with those crimes.

In *the Nuremberg SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial 1945-1958: Atrocity, Law and History*, Hilary Earl delves deeply into the issues surrounding Ohlendorf's transfer from RSHA, AMT III (*Hauptsturmführer*) to the *Einsatzgruppen* forces.²⁵⁷ From age 18 and prior with his youth group in Hoheneggelsen, Ohlendorf was the quintessential Nazi and National Socialism's most fervent member and supporter. This made him an ideal candidate to rise through the ranks, although he claimed reluctance to directly participate in genocide, nor was he obedient to the leaders of

²⁵⁶ Leo Alexander, "Medical Science Under Dictatorship," *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol. 241 (1949): 44. Note that Dr. Alexander is using the term in context with the set of Nuremberg Trials called the "Doctor Trials."

²⁵⁷ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 66.

the Party. In fact, Hilary Earl argues that his transfer to the *Einsatzgruppen* is not surprising at all, especially as an *Alter Kämpfer*.²⁵⁸ She states that his transition from Nazi economics to the *Einsatzgruppen* is a “good example of how the Nazis were able to involve even the most free-thinking members of the Party into mass murder.”²⁵⁹ To Earl, it is likely he was recruited because of his career ambition and *Alter Kämpfer* loyalty, despite his continual open criticism of many aspects of operation of the Nazi regime. Ohlendorf lived as an advocate for National Socialism, and was constantly disappointed by how Party politics interfered with the will of the people. Although there is no record of recruitment techniques, there is direct evidence that Himmler personally selected his *Einsatzgruppen* leaders.²⁶⁰

To lead the *Einsatzgruppen*, Himmler and Heydrich sought out men who were “excellent” and could carry out independent decision-making in the face of mass murder. Their resumés were expected to include an ability to negotiate between the Wehrmacht and the RSHA, to implement Reich directives, and to “improvise in the face of unforeseeable difficulties and problems.”²⁶¹ Ohlendorf was

²⁵⁸ Hilary Earl, “A Judge, A Prosecutor and a Mass Murderer: Courtroom Dynamics in the *SS-Einsatzgruppen* Trial,” In Kim C. Priemel and Alexa Stiller (eds.) *Reassessing the Nuremberg Military Tribunals: Transitional Justice, Trial Narratives, and Historiography* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 49-50.

²⁵⁹ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 66. In addition, there was no particular method of selection of the leaders, although Ohlendorf claimed *Blutkitt* as the reason Himmler put pressure on him to take the transfer. See more in Arad, Krakowski, and Spector, eds. *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, pp., v-vii. See Richard Rhodes, *Masters of Death* which claims the leaders were “handpicked” by Heydrich and Himmler, and that Ohlendorf had “fallen into disfavor with Himmler, 3.

²⁶⁰ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 67.

²⁶¹ Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, 274-275.

an ideal Nazi, whose resume demonstrated all of the traits Himmler and Heydrich expected in an *Einsatzgruppen* leader, and an *Alter Kämpfer*.

According to Ohlendorf's wife, he went to the front to redeem his reputation with Himmler.²⁶² That he desired to restore his standing (and further his career) by going to the front is absolutely correct. The dynamics of the feud between Himmler and Ohlendorf is certainly questionable, given that most of what is known of the alleged feud came to light under the pressures of the trial. In *An Uncompromising Generation*, Michael Wildt argues that our perception of what kind of person a killer *should* be is in contrast to the view of Ohlendorf, the careerist, who probably saw reassignment to an *Einsatzgruppen* as a positive professional move.²⁶³ Wildt adds that anything Ohlendorf and others stated at their trials that indicates that this transfer to the front was a punitive measure is, in his mind, a complete fabrication. Like Wildt, George Browder asserts that Ohlendorf pushed the *Blutkitt* too far, because he was rationalizing himself as a "brutalized executioner trying to explain his own failure" and fear to decline the position.²⁶⁴ Although the careerist drive of Ohlendorf and his colleagues certainly steered them toward the war front, they were academically groomed, and probably believed that putting in their time

²⁶² Höhne, *Death's Head*, 356-357.

²⁶³ Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, 274.

²⁶⁴ George Browder, *Hitler's Enforcers: The Gestapo and the SS Security Service in the Nazi Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 157.

enacting genocide was the only way to impress their superiors and uphold their *Alter Kämpfer* reputations.

Contrary to what historians like Earl have argued about Ohlendorf's reluctance in being transferred to the front, Ohlendorf and his wife Käthe were particularly adamant that he was compelled by Himmler and Heydrich to assume *Einsatzgruppe D's* command. At different times, Ohlendorf dismissed his involvement with the *Einsatzgruppen* as something that was not part of his career. In her letter to David Irving, she refers to this period as the "10 months in service" and is unconcerned with his actions. Rather, in writing a sort of résumé of her husband's career, she showcased the "good" he created "before" and "after" the ten months.²⁶⁵ Likewise, when Ohlendorf was first interrogated by the British, he initially did not offer any information about the *Einsatzgruppen*. After two separate interrogation sessions, his infamous forthrightness about the *Einsatzgruppen* was put forward only when the British interrogators found out that he was more than simply a high-ranking Nazi official.²⁶⁶

Perhaps this was because Ohlendorf viewed his role in the murder of 90,000 people as normal, right, or dutiful *Blutkitt*. More likely is that he viewed these ten months as an interruption in his RSHA career. Thus, in his mind, the Holocaust was not part of his career, not a portion which propelled him into the elite and involved intellectually challenging and fulfilling work. In his testimony, statements, and

²⁶⁵ K. Ohlendorf, *Letter to David Irving*.

²⁶⁶ CSDIC (UK), September 30, 1945.

affidavits, Ohlendorf denied willingness to be transferred. However, it is unlikely his post-*Einsatzgruppen* career would have thrived through various promotions (all the way to *Gruppenführer*) had he truly displayed any significant objection to being transferred to the front. Ohlendorf and his wife's post-war claims of vengeance and mistreatment by Himmler and Heydrich were most likely made to distance himself from responsibility.

Although it is clear that Ohlendorf's career benefitted from his transfer to the east, there are aspects of his employment record that corroborate some of Ohlendorf's claims of unfairness from Nazi leaders. Hanno Sowade notes that during Ohlendorf's time with the SD (while he was simultaneously working at the Kiel Institute for World Economics and Maritime Trade), in 1938 he was reduced to volunteer or "honorary" duties for speaking out in favor of economic policies that would benefit the middle class.²⁶⁷ This evidence demonstrates that although he held the privileged status of an *Alter Kämpfer*, he was not completely immune to reprimand. While on leave from his normal employment in the SD in 1934, Ohlendorf was recruited to a lectureship at Kiel by Jens Jessen. Here he acquired letters of recommendation to renew his leave of absence in order to commence his lectures and research. However, he was told that he had exceeded the maximum time away, and had to reapply to be a member of the SD, and for his license to practice law.²⁶⁸ He was forced to leave the university prematurely, and once he

²⁶⁷ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 157.

²⁶⁸ Between September 1935 and April 1936, Ohlendorf petitioned to teach at the university, and Prof. Dr. Jens Jessen wrote academic letters (letters of recommendation) requesting his "urgent" presence to help develop a new section of the school. On April 17, 1936,

returned to the SD, Ohlendorf was, according to Hanno Sowade, “left out in the cold.”²⁶⁹ There was certainly tension, perhaps even resentment from Ohlendorf when he resumed his position in the RSHA. According to Goldensohn’s interview with Walther Funk, he said “I always had the feeling that Ohlendorf was spiritually depressed...Ohlendorf must have been depressed on account of that experience...I thought he had something in his soul which bothered him.”²⁷⁰ It is unclear whether Funk was referring to before or after Ohlendorf’s time in the *Einsatzgruppen*. If after, this statement could reflect a degree of unhappiness about overseeing the horrific killings. However, Ohlendorf was most comfortable being transferred back to the RSHA, and continued to promote middle-class economics while developing a secret post-war economic plan.²⁷¹ Ohlendorf’s work with middle-class economic stimulation gained him popularity with union workers, however he became less overtly critical of Reich leaders after being transferred to the front.

Ohlendorf received a letter from the Reichsminister of Justice’s office saying he had been fired, and must reapply to the SD within two years to be reinstated in the party and as a practicing lawyer. Those documents are found in Bundesarchiv Berlin, R3012, 176-182 Nachlaß Otto Ohlendorf .

²⁶⁹ Sowade, “Otto Ohlendorf,” 157.

²⁷⁰ Gellately, ed., *Interviews*. This publication is a collection of interviews conducted of Nazi war criminals in captivity prior to the *Einsatzgruppen* Trials. This quote comes from Goldensohn’s interview with Walther Funk, 83.

²⁷¹ See the previous chapter concerning more specifics about Ohlendorf’s post-*Einsatzgruppen* work in economics. As for the “secret” economic policy, Ohlendorf worked on an economic recovery plan, with input from future West German President Ludwig Erhard. Doing so with public knowledge from the Reich would have meant Ohlendorf was a defeatist and likely a traitor. He did continue to give lectures on how to revise Speer’s economic policies and eventually worked in the Ministry of economics to try and stimulate the war-torn German economy.

In addition to feeling slighted by being forced to curtail his tenure at the university, and to return to the Nazi political economy, Ohlendorf delved more deeply into the public opinion reports. In September 1939, Ohlendorf was made head of the RSHA AMT III (SD-Inland) in charge of all research and public opinion in Germany. Sowade argued that Ohlendorf was an anomalous character in the Reich: a National Socialist ideologue that was targeted for being critical of the Nazi party. Ohlendorf was “troublesome in many respects” to this position.²⁷² The problem with this representation of Ohlendorf is that it does *not* include his *Alter Kämpfer* status. Regardless of the criticism he gave or received, he was protected by his membership. He just happened to have an arrogant, self-righteous personality, serving the Reich while being critical of Himmler, Speer, and others who did not adhere to what he deemed to be pure National Socialism. The public opinion reports were designed to operate as an “early warning system” to demonstrate weaknesses in the Reich, and their policies, through polling the public. The researchers were members of the secret police and conducted the surveys in a way that Himmler disliked. Ohlendorf said of Himmler’s opinion of him, “[to him] I was the unbearable, humorless Prussian, an unsoldierly type, a defeatist, and damned intellectual...Himmler disliked order...”²⁷³ Of course this alleged description of

²⁷² Sowade, “Otto Ohlendorf,” 157. The Reich repeatedly tried to legitimize itself by appointing “experts” (academic professionals) to Reich positions. Given Ohlendorf’s experience at Kiel and penchant for middle class economics, he was, on paper, the ideal candidate, even if he caused problems with other Nazi officials. See Wildt for more details concerning “academics” in Nazi promotions.

²⁷³ TWC, pp. 233-234.

Ohlendorf from Himmler was only given during Nuremberg testimony. Certainly, there was bias inherent, but Sowade, Earl, and many other historians call on this segment of testimony (and Ohlendorf's description of Himmler's character) to demonstrate the possible feud. Sowade did argue that Himmler's disdain for Ohlendorf never resulted in his being forced to leave the SS.²⁷⁴ An example is the testimony of Felix Kersten, Himmler's private doctor, who also spoke of strife between Ohlendorf and Himmler.

In addition to Nazi concepts of *Blutkitt*, Ohlendorf's connection to the Anthroposophical Society was another part of his self-defense, but only appears as an afterthought. Established by Rudolf Steiner in 1922, Anthroposophy is a Christian-based, humanistic belief system popular in Nazi Germany as an alternative religion with ideas compatible with National Socialism.²⁷⁵ In 1933, the Anthroposophical Society was banned, along with numerous other religious and new-age societies, as part of the consolidation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 158.

²⁷⁵ Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism*, 105. For more information on aspects of the Anthroposophical Society see also, Uwe Werner, *Anthroposophen in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus: 1933-1945* (München: Oldenbourg, 1999). For the purposes of this essay, I have kept an analysis of this particular society brief. The reader should be aware that interwar Germany was a place where a great eruption of alternative belief systems occurred.

²⁷⁶ The *Volksgemeinschaft* was more than a "people's community". It was a Hitlerian utopia; Germany would be racially unified in a single community of the people and the nation superseded individual interests. This was all driven by massive propaganda techniques and Hitler's utopian vision was, in many aspects, indeed realized. For more information on the *Volksgemeinschaft*, see George Mosse, *Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), and Michael Wildt, *Hitler's 'Volksgemeinschaft' and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion: Violence Against Jews in Provincial Germany, 1919-1939* (Hamburg: Berghahn Books, 2007).

However, Interior Minister Frick temporarily reinstated the Anthroposophical Society due to their belief in organic biodynamic farming, only to have the organization banned again because of its threat to the successful chemical industry.²⁷⁷ Although the association of the Nazis and the occult is well-known and has been written about extensively, the Nazi Party was suspicious of other alternative belief systems gaining strength in Germany. Anthroposophy posed a greater problem for the Nazi party because lead party officials like Hess and Ohlendorf advocated lenient treatment of this particular society, against the wishes of Himmler and Heydrich.

Ohlendorf's ties to Anthroposophy can be traced back to his childhood. His older brother, Heinrich, joined the society in 1929.²⁷⁸ Throughout his adult life, he was associated with the society, having chosen an anthroposophical doctor, Dr. Werner Haverbeck, as his personal physician, personal and religious consultant in Landsberg prison, confidant, and family consoler. In 1951, Dr. Haverbeck performed the last rights and burial of Ohlendorf. According to his wife, Käthe, Haverbeck even helped comfort her mother-in-law after Ohlendorf's execution.²⁷⁹ In Käthe's letter to David Irving, she refers to her husband as having "fought" for Anthroposophy and that with his death, the society "had lost their protection." She

²⁷⁷ Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism*, 131.

²⁷⁸ Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism*, 105.

²⁷⁹ K. Ohlendorf, *Letter to David Irving*.

said this despite the end of the Nazi era, in order to point out how significant his devotion to the society was, as well as to criticize the new system.

A high-ranking official being associated with Anthroposophism is significant for two reasons. Not only was a group banned by the government as subversive and at odds with Nazi beliefs, but additionally, the movement was also associated with the Jews. In the beginning, Steiner's vision of the society was much more utopian, displaying a wide diversity. As more criticism amassed against Anthroposophy, Steiner was forced to denounce Jewish membership and beliefs.²⁸⁰ Naturally, as the Nazis slowly instituted Jewish bans and exclusions, this society was targeted. Whatever were the ties to the Jewish faith and membership in the 1930s, Ohlendorf was still a proponent of the society. This would definitely have incurred criticism from Himmler and Heydrich as well. In a desperate attempt to clear her husband's name and reputation, Käthe Ohlendorf wrote to David Irving "he still fought for them...both the Jews and the Anthroposophists."²⁸¹ This statement seems exaggerated to make Ohlendorf appear as if he were a martyr for a cause. Käthe goes on to write how it was a "good opportunity" for Bormann, Ley, and Heydrich to make trouble for her husband. It is also noteworthy that in modern Anthroposophical literature, Ohlendorf was named as a proponent of the belief system, whereas in other Ohlendorf biographies, his association is downplayed.

²⁸⁰ Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism*, 108-112.

²⁸¹ K. Ohlendorf, *Letter to David Irving*. The original German text/context reads "...dass er auch dann noch für sie kämpfte, als – nach dem flug von Hess – so- wohl die Juden wie Anthr. Ihren letzten Schutz verloren hatten. Eine gute Gelegenheit für BORMANN (emphasis hers), aber auch Goebbels, Ley und Heydrich, diesen Quertreiben aus dem Weg zu schaffen!"

Reich leaders, like Heydrich, certainly took note of Ohlendorf's Anthroposophical ties, especially since the Reich banned their practice. If Himmler and Heydrich were looking for motives to transfer Ohlendorf to the front, his questionable ties to the Anthroposophical society did him no favors.

Was Ohlendorf's reassignment to *Einsatzgruppe D* a disciplinary transfer? The preceding discussion was constructed to point out the lack of a simple answer to the question. Hanno Sowade discussed Ohlendorf's steadfast, bullheaded character, and problems with Himmler and Heydrich, but also points out that when he was assigned to the *Einsatzgruppen*, he voluntarily stayed longer than any *Einsatzgruppen* colleagues who took up their duties at the same time as he did.²⁸² In fact Sowade says he "emphatically refused" to leave Russia early, when offered an opportunity.²⁸³ According to Sowade's sources (letters from Ohlendorf to his wife from the front), Ohlendorf felt "accomplished..." with a "feeling of being right" concerning his transfer and actions there.²⁸⁴ Yet in the next paragraph, Sowade argues that "the attempt to make him [Ohlendorf] more docile by involving him in mass murder in the USSR had failed."²⁸⁵ If the plan to transfer Ohlendorf was to make him more submissive by sending him to the front, Himmler and Heydrich's

²⁸² Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 159.

²⁸³ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 159.

²⁸⁴ Note here that I did not have access to these particular sources cited by Sowade, nor was it my translation. In a letter from Ohlendorf, at the front, to his wife, it is important to study how he portrayed his duties to Mrs. Ohlendorf, despite any alleged reluctance to commit mass murder.

²⁸⁵ Sowade, "Otto Ohlendorf," 160.

efforts were futile.²⁸⁶ Ohlendorf did not want to be transferred (or was bullied into it), but the careerist complied, and excelled at it. He finally returned home a decorated war hero who would be promoted to Lieutenant General (*Gruppenführer*) by the end of the war. His career continued to flourish until his surrender on May 23, 1945.

Certainly, taking into account the public opinion reports, the alleged hostility with Himmler and Heydrich, *Blutkitt*, the Anthroposophical society, and his vocational trajectory, it is clear that there were complex circumstances surrounding Ohlendorf's transfer. Like Wildt, Earl and other historians have said that (on trial) Ohlendorf was probably desperately trying to find any method to expunge guilt in his *Einsatzgruppen* activities. However, downplaying his willingness to assume the leadership of the *Einsatzgruppen* does not make career sense, especially for an *Alter Kämpfer*. He knew this assignment would help his career; being transferred showed he was able to improvise, demonstrate superior critical thinking, and implement central directives.²⁸⁷ That is what Himmler and Heydrich wanted. Without question, to an academic like Ohlendorf, inexperienced in participating in warfare or genocide, the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen* weighed heavily on his psyche.

²⁸⁶ Note that Heydrich died from injuries inflicted after an assassination attempt in Prague in 1942.

²⁸⁷ Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, 274-275.

***Einsatzgruppen*: Inception and Directives**

The *Einsatzgruppen* arguably performed some of the most violent, heinous, and horrific crimes of the entire Holocaust. Men, women, and children, Jews and partisans alike were slaughtered in pogroms involving being shot and thrown into ditches, *en masse*, or being loaded into gas vans where women and children were slowly murdered over the course of ten to fifteen minutes. This section covers a basic history of the *Einsatzgruppen* and details how Otto Ohlendorf's position in the Nazi party led him from being a desk-job intellectual to the leader of a mobile killing squad that murdered 91,678 people. There are two main questions to be resolved regarding the *Einsatzgruppen*. First, was there an execution order prior to Operation Barbarossa? Second, why did the Reich pass on unclear directives to minimally trained leaders like Ohlendorf, to brutally murder nearly two million people?

Prior to September 1, 1939, the *Einsatzgruppen*, created by Reinhard Heydrich (*SS- Obergruppenführer*), were specialized military units who operated under control of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*).²⁸⁸ With the smaller subgroups, *Einsatzkommandos*, the *Einsatzgruppen* were a paramilitary group designed to take control of buildings, confiscate important documents, and question suspicious

²⁸⁸ Joseph Tenenbaum dated the beginnings of the *Einsatzgruppen* back to the 1938 invasion of Czechoslovakia, see J. Tenenbaum, "The *Einsatzgruppen*," *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Jan., 1955), 43-44. He also claims that Heydrich's ascent to Chief of Security Police and Security Service exactly coincides with the invasion of Poland.

activities of people and groups.²⁸⁹ It was not until the preparation for Operation Barbarossa that the nature of *Einsatzgruppen* morphed into the infamous killing units who enacted mass murder in Soviet occupied territory. In “The *Einsatzgruppen*,” Joseph Tenenbaum argued that prior to Barbarossa, partisan opposition in areas where the *Einsatzgruppen* were assigned was directed by the Wehrmacht, which had its own field police, and were constantly at odds with Himmler’s “ambition to play general.”²⁹⁰ By 1941, the *Einsatzgruppen* were under the direction of the RSHA (Reich Security Main Office), and Ohlendorf was AMT III, SD-Inland, leader.²⁹¹ Therefore, transferring Ohlendorf to *Einsatzgruppe* leadership was not a complicated task.²⁹²

On September 27, 1939, the heads of the RSHA and *Einsatzgruppen* met to discuss measures for engaging these units after the Wehrmacht swept through

²⁸⁹ In the beginning, the *Einsatz* groups were sent into Austria after the March 11, 1938 Anschluß. They were meant to be a police force present in the newly occupied territory which gathered documents and intelligence, reporting it back to the Reich. The term *Einsatzgruppen* is best translated as “Task Force”. Later they are most frequently referenced as “Mobile Killing Units,” although this is not a direct translation. This evolution took place over less than two years.

²⁹⁰ Tenenbaum, “*Einsatzgruppen*,” 45.

²⁹¹ There are numerous organizations that overlapped in authority with regard to the *Einsatzgruppen*. The *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD, Security Service), *SS* (*Schutzstaffel*), *SiPo* (*Sicherheitspolizei*, Security Police), *OrPo* (*Ordnungspolizei*, order police) were all drawn from to acquire personnel for the *Einsatzgruppen*. Depending on what time and to where the *Einsatzgruppen* are referred, the associated groups change. For the time period of this essay, 1941-1942 was Ohlendorf’s tenure as leader of *Einsatzgruppe D*. He was under the direct command of RSHA leader Heydrich and *SS/Reichsführer* Himmler.

²⁹² For one of the best accounts of the early activities of the *Einsatzgruppen* in Poland (1939-1941) refer to Jürgen Matthäus, Jochen Böhlér, and Klaus-Michael Mallman, *War, Pacification, and Mass Murder, 1939: The Einsatzgruppen in Poland* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).

Poland. Heydrich, Eichmann, Ohlendorf and a dozen other officials discussed the Führer's approval to, among other things, relocate Jews and Gypsies, ghettoize the Jews, and make itinerant laborers of the Poles. From this meeting, the minutes prove there were set goals, but how they were to be achieved and what the specific tasks were remained unclear.²⁹³ However, the *Einsatzgruppen* acted on them and did so with the unsaid approval of the Reich leadership. What changes dramatically with the invasion of the Soviet Union is that there are clear orders to kill: the Commissar Order and the Barbarossa Order. The Wannsee Conference also made it clear that the orders were coming from on high. Despite understanding these directives, the act of genocide remained largely improvisational, and the *Einsatzgruppen* leaders were given little guidance regarding technique and logistics.

Having already discussed the conditions of Ohlendorf's transfer, he and the other Barbarossa *Einsatzgruppen* leaders were sent to the police academy in the town of Pretzsch for training prior to their full transfer to the front. Käthe Ohlendorf wrote that her husband "...who was not a soldier..." went through a six-week training.²⁹⁴ Richard Rhodes pieced together training accounts, describing the period as three weeks during which novices fired a weapon, listened to lectures, and not much more.²⁹⁵ He points out that since the men had to be inoculated and were

²⁹³ Matthäus, Böhler, and Mallman, *War, Pacification, and Murder*, 128-129. Document entitled "Protocol of a Meeting of RSHA Department Heads and Einsatzgruppen Commanders, September 27, 1939," USHMM RG 14.016M (BAB, R 58-825/ fiche) 1:14 (Translated from German).

²⁹⁴ K. Ohlendorf, *Letter to David Irving*.

²⁹⁵ Rhodes, *Masters of Death*, 11-13.

weak from fever, rigorous training could not occur at this time. Near the end of the “training”, the assignments were given and the men, including the *Einsatzgruppen* leaders, found out where they would be deployed. Ohlendorf received notice he would command *Einsatzgruppe D*, attached to the Eleventh Army in Bessarabia (southwestern Soviet Union, including Crimea, Simferopol, and Sevastopol). After June 1942, he was succeeded by SS Colonel Walther Bierkamp.²⁹⁶

By 1941, there were four *Einsatzgruppen* (A, B, C, D) that were in charge of following the Wehrmacht, as Operation Barbarossa spread the Germans eastward. They were ordered to clear the German-occupied Soviet territory of Jews, partisans, Commissars, and other subversive groups. Each *Einsatzgruppe* was assigned to clear territory, north to south (A-D), and liquidate the inhabitants. With assistance from local police, paramilitary groups, anti-Semitic citizens, etc.... the *Einsatzgruppen* rounded up the wanted persons, and transported them to another location. Here, men were shot, military execution style, and thrown into pre-excavated mass graves. As Operation Barbarossa expanded, so did mass murder by the *Einsatzgruppen*. Within six months of the invasion, the killing included women and children, employing gas vans to disastrous effect. Pogroms like Babi Yar messily and chaotically annihilated more than 33,000 people in two days.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ For more on Bierkamp, see Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*. Note that he committed suicide May 15th, 1945, a week after the surrender, and a week prior to Ohlendorf surrendering to the Allies. Thus, he was never tried.

²⁹⁷ Babi Yar was the result of *Einsatzgruppe C*'s liquidation efforts. Under the command of Dr. Otto Rasch (and *Sonderkommando* leader Paul Blobel), in Kiev 33,771 people were murdered over a 2-day period. For more information on the Babi Yar massacre see Richard Rhodes *Masters of Death*, p. 170-180. Only 10% of the victims of the massacre have been identified. For an eyewitness survivor account of Babi Yar see Karel C. Berkhoff, “Dina

After the Wannsee Conference, the “Final Solution” became official Reich policy, and the *Einsatzgruppen* forces were increased to accompany Operation Barbarossa. Although historians had previously given much importance to the January 20, 1942 meeting at Wannsee, there is little evidence to support its uniqueness. The *Einsatzgruppen* had already been active for nearly eight months. The realization of this fact has generated new questions concerning the actual purpose of the conference. For Mark Roseman, Wannsee changed little regarding the *Einsatzgruppen* or the Holocaust. It did outline numbers, and documented the systemization of killing and procedures at camps and on the eastern front. For Heydrich and Eichmann, both present at the meeting, which they initiated and controlled, it also provided confirmation that the fifteen leaders from different offices and divisions supported the transition from mass murder to genocide.²⁹⁸ Already in place were directives for the *Einsatzgruppen*. Unfortunately, documenting the directives has become a contentious matter, prompting historians to take sides.

Pronicheva’s Story of Surviving the Babi Yar Massacre: German, Jewish, Soviet, Russian and Ukrainian Records” in *The Shoah in the Ukraine: History, Testimony and Memorialization*, eds. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp. 291-317.

²⁹⁸ Mark Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration* (New York: Picador, 2002). Roseman allows the reader to consider that the Wannsee Conference is not as historically remarkable as it has been previously viewed. Clearly there was already an implemented program of destroying the European Jewry prior to the conference, but a large part of Roseman’s argument is that Eichmann brought a complete tally of Jews, organized by percentage Jewish, and by region to be addressed at the meeting. Also, he notes that no one who could authorize an order to destroy the Jews was present. Although Heydrich was the highest ranking official, only Himmler or Hitler could impose such a massive order.

The debate over intent and function had dominated the historiography for nearly two decades. As Michael Wildt points out, Goldhagen revisited the question of whether the men murdered “because they had to or because they were allowed to”.²⁹⁹ In the case of Ohlendorf, Goldhagen argues that Ohlendorf killed Jews because he was an eager, violent anti-Semite.³⁰⁰ While there is no question he was anti-Semitic, it is doubtful his desire was to commit the atrocities themselves; at least until he was transferred to the *Einsatzgruppen*, and he implemented orders to enact murder. The crux of the intentional/functional debate is the question of whether Hitler was at the center of genocide or whether it was improvised as it unfolded. This debate has already been previously addressed and analyzed in the historiographical section. Without reexamining the entire debate, in brief, it is centered on orders and historians grouped into two extremes. One camp argues that there was a Führer order from the beginning. The other maintains that “the Holocaust was the result of chaos and improvisation.” Although today there is a historical center at which both extremes meet, agreeing that there probably was a Führer order (or at least intent), but escalating the Holocaust was a result of improvisation. Among those who improvised by enforcing and interpreting these orders were people like Ohlendorf.

The *Einsatzgruppen*’s activities are well-known and researched, thanks in great part to the very detailed records the Nazis kept. This did not inhibit Ohlendorf

²⁹⁹ Wildt, *Uncompromising Generation*, 3.

³⁰⁰ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 52.

and other defendants from contesting validity of the numbers at the Nuremberg Trials.³⁰¹ Calling statistics into question was a tactic used by Ohlendorf to try and argue that the reports were not as accurate as they seemed. When questioned, he argued that the number of casualties had been exaggerated, but was able to come up with a figure of 90,000, which is startlingly close to the figures in the reports. He stated “the figures which I saw of other Einsatzgruppen are considerably larger...I believe that to a large extent the figures submitted by the other Einsatzgruppen were exaggerated.”³⁰² While on trial, he deduced that because his figures were lower than those presented by the other three Einsatzgruppen, they must have inflated their casualty numbers. The accuracy of Ohlendorf’s numbers was corroborated in the *Operational Situational Reports, U.S.S.R.*³⁰³ These reports were sent to the Chief of the Security Police and the Security Service, where the compiled numbers were checked by each *Einsatzgruppen* commander from information gathered by each *Einsatzkommando and Sonderkommando*. Meticulous at

³⁰¹ Well-documented except for the papers Ohlendorf and the RSHA destroyed on the eve of Germany’s official surrender. Ohlendorf’s candid testimony shocked the trial officials, who were astounded that he was able to so accurately recall the number 90,000 dead (which was very close to the exacting 91,678 recorded in the compiled *Einsatzgruppen* reports). Likewise, until all of the surviving documents were assessed, other defendants, particularly Paul Blobel and Otto Rasch, said the numbers were inaccurate. See Hilary Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial* for a deep analysis of number accuracy in the trial.

³⁰² TWC, Ohlendorf Testimony, January 3, 1946, p. 319.

³⁰³ The *Operational Situational Reports (Ereignismeldungen UdSSR)* were morning briefings sent from the *Einsatzgruppen* back to the RSHA with detailed accounts of their activities to include troop movements and casualty numbers. Some reports, especially from Ohlendorf’s division, are so detailed that they divided casualties into religious groups, by ethnicity, gender, and/or age. The original reports are at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

recordkeeping, each commando reported to their *Einsatz* division, and reports were delivered by radio, teletype, and in written summaries to Berlin.³⁰⁴ In Berlin, they were evaluated by RSHA AMT IV Office for Communism. According to Ronald Headland, Ohlendorf's estimate of 90,000 was remarkably close to the 91,678, noted in OSR 190 and submitted as evidence at Nuremberg.³⁰⁵ Where he was trying to show exaggeration, his object was to demonstrate how other Einsatzgruppen were not as meticulous as his division. He also clarified that he, himself, did not keep a tally, but recalled the number 90,000 from reading the reports compiled from his *Einsatzkommandos* and *Sonderkommandos*. His purpose may have been to steer responsibility downward, instead of demonstrating trust in his section leaders to report with accuracy. In this *Operational Situational Report*, number 190 dated April 8, 1942, it reads:

Location: Simferopol...there are no more Jews, Krimchaks, or Gypsies" in Crimea. It gives statistics from the second half of March with a breakdown of those killed by category and says "to date, 91,678 have been shot."³⁰⁶

OSR 190 is the report that stated the total number killed under Ohlendorf's command; other trial evidence aside, this is the document that officially condemned him to death. The *Einsatzgruppen* were responsible for an estimated 1,400,000 of all Holocaust casualties, although this figure varies from one million to two million,

³⁰⁴ Tenenbaum, "*Einsatzgruppen*," 52.

³⁰⁵ Headland, *Messages of Murder*, 271.

³⁰⁶ *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, OSR, 190, pp., 325-326. This is the report that condemned Ohlendorf.

depending on what groupings and regions are included in the death toll.³⁰⁷In *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Raul Hilberg points out that at particular times “these formations [*Einsatzgruppen* and local police forces] seemed to justify their existence with numbers.”³⁰⁸ By Hilberg’s calculation, Ohlendorf’s command of *Einsatzgruppe D* killed approximately 6.4% of all *Einsatzgruppen* casualties. While other defendants may have tried to deny their statistics, at the trial, Ohlendorf casually mentioned what he thought were the number killed in his command with relative ease and accuracy.³⁰⁹ More on Ohlendorf’s behavior and testimony during the trial will be discussed in a later chapter; however, the way in which he nonchalantly conveyed that he was responsible for murdering 90,000 Jews and partisans astounded the courtroom. According to Otto Ohlendorf, and all except for one *Einsatzgruppen* Trial defendant, there was a clear order that the job of the task forces was to eliminate Jews and partisans on the eastern front, following the Wehrmacht’s advance through Operation Barbarossa. In “The Tasks of the SS *Einsatzgruppen*,” historian Alfred Streim analyzed testimony of defendants concerning directives. He concludes that there was no order in the beginning, but

³⁰⁷ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3 Volumes, 3d ed (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 1320. See also a painstakingly researched and chronicled breakdown of casualty statistics in the chapter entitled “Statistics of Jewish Dead.” The *Einsatzgruppen* Trial’s opening and closing arguments estimated 2,000,000 killed. See United States Holocaust Memorial Museum transcript, Court II, Case 9 *The United States v. Otto Ohlendorf, et.al.* RG-06. 024 *19 Otto Ohlendorf 1948 Apr. 8.

³⁰⁸ Hilberg, *Destruction*, 1303.

³⁰⁹ Hilberg, *Destruction*, 1303, 1320, and appendix.

there was some procedure in place for enacting murder.³¹⁰ Evolving policies began with the call to eliminate draft-aged men, and quickly escalated to orders to kill any man, woman, and child of particular ethnic and religious identities, as well as any person deemed to be a Reich enemy. Fear of revenge for those killed was the defense's way to justify murdering women and children after Barbarossa.³¹¹ Specifics on murdering women and children will be addressed later in this dissertation.

Ohlendorf's affidavits, pre-trial, and trial testimonies indicate that from the beginning, there was a standing order for "liquidation."³¹² Ohlendorf, an experienced lawyer himself, possibly had two goals in adopting the "we were following a clear military directive" defense. Firstly, Ohlendorf's defense strategy was to distance himself from Reich orders. He did this by testifying that soldiers do not question orders. Secondly, he assumed he would be given a military trial, or at least treated as a soldier carrying out orders. To his mortification and chagrin, this

³¹⁰ Alfred Streim, "The Tasks of the Einsatzgruppen," (*Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 4, 1987), 309-328.

³¹¹ Streim, "Tasks of the *Einsatzgruppen*," 309-328.

³¹² In the British Intelligence Reports of POW interrogations (CSDIC), there is the first documented case of Ohlendorf claiming there was a standing order, preceding his assignment to the *Einsatzgruppen*. He never faltered from this statement, and when repeatedly asked (especially on 3, Jan. 1946, [339, 353]) of the nature of the orders, Ohlendorf made the court aware of how the nature of the order changed, depending on the date. For instance, he noted that the liquidation order came to include women and children (332) and that in 1942, women and children, specifically, were allowed to be executed in gas vans, in an attempt to make killing mentally easier on his soldiers.

was not the case.³¹³ Thanks to the testimony of Erich von Manstein, commander of the 11th Army, and the myth of the “Clean Wehrmacht”, paramilitary groups like the *SS* or *Einsatzgruppen* were tried much more hastily and severely punished.³¹⁴ If the Wehrmacht were aware of the activities and directives of the paramilitary groups, their leaders and soldiers pretended they had no knowledge.³¹⁵ Presumably there was knowledge of particular objectives or directives given that, in the case of *Einsatzgruppe D*, they were attached to the 11th Army. The Army would *have* to know why, if not how and by whom, *Einsatzgruppen* orders were implemented.

³¹³ In Mrs. Ohlendorf’s letter to David Irving, she impressed the fact that her husband felt as if the system under which he was judged was corrupted and faulty because he was not tried as part of the military personnel. For Ohlendorf, he considered himself and the *Einsatzgruppen* inseparable from the activities of the Wehrmacht. He was even promoted and awarded in the same manner as the military were. There is some validity to his and her claim of injustice. It makes sense that he would be tried with the military and by the military as E-D was attached to the 11th Army and was in close personal contact with von Schobert and Erich von Manstein (Army commanders during his time with the *Einsatzgruppen*). Mrs. Ohlendorf wrote that in her husband’s “testimonial,” he gathered evidence to refute von Manstein’s claim that he never met Ohlendorf, and was not informed of what *Einsatzgruppe D* was actually doing. Von Manstein was utilized in proceedings against Ohlendorf (and the *Einsatzgruppen*), claiming they barely knew each other, and that von Manstein had no knowledge of the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen*. The Ohlendorfs both felt he had been wrongly tried with the *Einsatzgruppen* case and strongly argued (along with Ohlendorf’s defense lawyer, Dr. Rudolf Aschenauer) that he should be tried in the same way as military personnel.

³¹⁴ Manstein was sentenced to 18 years in prison for nine criminal counts, and was released before his sentence was fulfilled. The concept of “clean Wehrmacht” (*Saubere Wehrmacht*) denoted the myth that the Army was superior to and had no knowledge of the actions of paramilitary groups. Reinforcing this myth resulted in the Army having completed WWII without extra blood on their hands, as it were, the Holocaust. Therefore, their reputation remained untarnished and leaders unscathed. For more information on “clean Wehrmacht,” see Wolfram Wette’s *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

³¹⁵ I have utilized the word “soldier” to describe the men of the *Einsatzgruppen* because this is how Ohlendorf referred to them. Additionally, Ohlendorf received military decorations and commendations for his work in the *Einsatzgruppen*.

The goal of examining the disputed relationship between the Wehrmacht and the *Einsatzgruppen* is to demonstrate not only how Ohlendorf and the *Einsatzgruppen* believed they were essentially military personnel acting on orders, but to point out how the Reich's inability to accurately define roles in the war and the Holocaust created the need for frequent improvisation. In this case, how the *Einsatzgruppen* were defined by Himmler and Heydrich, either to the groups themselves or to the Army, was done so poorly that it caused Ohlendorf a great deal of confusion. He was given military rank and commendation; however, he was tried as a civilian perpetrator. This demonstrates how ill-defined the *Einsatzgruppen* were, even to its own leaders. Unfortunately for Ohlendorf, his defense strategy backfired, and he was not granted the military trial he hoped for. But the relationship between the *Einsatzgruppen* and the Wehrmacht was, indeed, cooperative. In at least one documented case (Kamianets-Podilskyi, Ukraine) the Wehrmacht "systematically cooperated" with the *Einsatzgruppen* to destroy Jewish communities.³¹⁶

Process and Procedure

Conducting mass murder was similar throughout each of the *Einsatzgruppen* divisions. There were improvised aspects involving the killing of women and children that Ohlendorf testified to utilizing, such as employing gas vans (*Gaswagen*), ordered by Himmler in 1942.³¹⁷ However, in towns that were to be

³¹⁶ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 200-201.

³¹⁷ TWC, Ohlendorf testimony, 3 Jan., 1946.

cleared out, the methods were similar throughout *Einsatzgruppen* territory. Under the pretext of resettlement, notices were posted for the Jewish population to meet at a certain point with a day and time to be registered, to have stock taken of their valuables, and to await relocation. On January 3, 1946, Ohlendorf described how the killings were carried out to American prosecutor Colonel J. H. Amen. Although he testified only to have been present at two of *Einsatzgruppe D*'s mass liquidations, he said for "purposes of inspection," he relayed details of other round-ups:

COL. AMEN: Will you explain to the Tribunal in detail how an individual mass execution was carried out?

OHLENDORF: A local Einsatzkommando attempted to collect all the Jews in its area by registering them. This registration was performed by the Jews themselves.

COL. AMEN: On what pretext, if any, were they rounded up?

OHLENDORF: On the pretext that they were to be resettled. After the registration the Jews were collected at one place; and from there they were later transported to the place of execution, which was, as a rule, an antitank ditch or a natural excavation. The executions were carried out in a military manner, by firing squads under command. They were transported to the place of execution in trucks, always only as many as could be executed immediately. In this way it was attempted to keep the span of time from the moment in which the victims knew what was about to happen to them until the time of their actual execution as short as possible. They were obliged to take off their outer garments immediately before the execution. The bodies were buried in the antitank ditch or excavation. The unit leaders or the firing-squad commanders had orders to see to this and, if need be, finish them off themselves. All valuables were confiscated at the time of the registration or the rounding up and handed over to the Finance Ministry, either through the RSHA or directly.³¹⁸

As told by Ohlendorf, this part of the process was similar for all the *Einsatzgruppen*. Prior to entire communities being eliminated following Barbarossa, the earlier directives were still valid and used, but expanded to a level with little room for survival. Ohlendorf's description of an *Einsatzgruppen* mass extermination

³¹⁸ TWC Ohlendorf testimony excerpts, 3 Jan. 1946, pp. 319-322.

incident is aligned with survivor testimony. Dina Pronicheva, a Babi Yar victim, testified to the process occurring in a similar fashion to Ohlendorf's version. Other accounts describe *Einsatzgruppen* perpetration in full gruesome detail. "The execution area was a terrible sight. The ground round the well was covered in blood; there were also bits of brain on the ground which the victims had to step in...but it wasn't at that point that they first realized what lay ahead for them. They could already hear the shooting and screaming from the place where they were kept waiting."³¹⁹ A member of *Einsatzgruppe C*, instructed to perform his first killing session said "...I only managed to shoot about five times. I began to feel unwell, I felt as though I was in a dream. Afterwards I was laughed at because I couldn't shoot anymore."³²⁰ An account from Anton Heidborn (*Sonderkommando 4a*) said after a mass execution "the next few days were spent smoothing out banknotes belonging to the Jews that had been shot...totaled millions...It was packed up in sacks and sent off somewhere."³²¹ Having eyewitness accounts proves significant to studying the *Einsatzgruppen* for figuring out systemization, directives, and mechanization of the Holocaust on the eastern front. More importantly is the insight it provides into the psychology of killers.

³¹⁹ "Statement of Schutzpolizist Tögel, member of *Einsatzkommando 10a*", in Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, and Volker Riess, eds., *"The Good Old Days" The Holocaust as Seen by the Perpetrators and Bystanders* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 61-62.

³²⁰ "Statement of teleprinter engineer Kiebach, *Einsatzgruppe C*", in *The Good Old Days*, 62.

³²¹ "Anton Heidborn (*Sonderkommando 4a*) on the days that followed", in *The Good Old Days*, 67-68.

The mission of the *Einsatzgruppen* did evolve from its inception to the invasion of the Soviet Union. What carried over from the *Einsatzgruppen* procedures of 1939 in Poland was the shooting of civilians. In the beginning, political groups were targeted in order to make the regime, town or village collapse.³²² The *Einsatzgruppen* of 1941 still singled out political functionaries, intellectuals, and prisoners of war, but in a telegram from Heydrich, dated 2 July 1941, he listed the main targets of execution and mentioned the elimination of other “dangerous elements.” What were dangerous elements? Snyder, in *Bloodlands*, argues that the *Einsatzgruppen* and *Einsatzkommando* groups had difficulty recognizing Soviet military insignia to eliminate the prisoners of war as directed.³²³ Snyder also analyzes how from the time of the successful invasion of the Soviet Union, the task of the *Einsatzgruppen* had been to kill Soviet elites and quicken the Soviet collapse, without specific directives to eliminate Jews.³²⁴ However, Ohlendorf’s argument concerning the orders is incorrect because by August 1941, Himmler endorsed the complete extermination of Jewish communities.

There was a pre-existing directive to eliminate large Jewish populations. Likewise, many historians argue that there was an order from the beginning and that it most likely evolved into the systematic mass extermination of all Jews and partisans. If there had not been any order prior to Barbarossa, the *Einsatzgruppen*

³²² Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 182-183.

³²³ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 183.

³²⁴ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 206-207.

were sent to follow the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front for what reason? This makes little sense. For men like Ohlendorf, present as RSHA AMT III leader at the 1939 Heydrich “protocol” meeting, this was already known. Ohlendorf testified, “on the question of Jews and Communists, the *Einsatzgruppen* and the commanders of the *Einsatzkommandos* were orally instructed before their mission.”³²⁵ Although there was no written *Einsatzgruppen* order that said “eliminate all Jews from German-occupied areas”, the anti-Semitic quest for *Lebensraum* was understood and implemented, beginning in 1938. Götz Aly argues that *Lebensraum*, clearing out German-occupied areas to make room for the ever-growing Aryan population, was the precursor of mass murder. The ultimate goal was to eliminate social competition and provide relief for the German people.³²⁶ The quest for *Lebensraum* became focused against the Jews, escalating into the Holocaust.

There are numerous details about the *Einsatzgruppen* killings that are clear. For instance, there are detailed reports of *Einsatzgruppen* movements, and documents directing the groups to eliminate political threats and prisoners of war. Also documented were the numbers of casualties by city, region, race and religion,

³²⁵ TWC, Ohlendorf testimony, 3 Jan. 1946, p. 316.

³²⁶ Götz Aly, *Why the Germans? Why the Jews? Envy, Race Hatred, and the Prehistory of the Holocaust*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2011), 179. Note that the term *Lebensraum* was first coined in 1901 by Friederich Ratzel, German geographer, who believed that Germany should make itself self-sufficient by acquiring land for natural resources. The Nazis adopted this concept and made it instrumental to their takeover of Austria, Czechoslovakia, etc...in the months prior to WWII. For more on *Lebensraum* see Woodruff D. Smith, *The Ideological Origins of German Imperialism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Woodruff D. Smith, "Friedrich Ratzel and the Origins of Lebensraum," (*German Studies Review* 3, no. 1, 1980) 51-68, a small section in Christopher Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

and how each *Einsatzgruppe* followed as attachments to the Wehrmacht in Operation Barbarossa. Despite what Ohlendorf and other defendants said of number exaggerations, the *Einsatzgruppen* were extremely effective. However, it remains unclear to what extent the actions of each *Einsatzgruppe* were improvised, and how much of the murder was mandated by the Reich. Ohlendorf's testimony revealed that there was no real, set way to carry out the murder of Reich "enemies." In meetings, Heydrich gave logistical suggestions and the leaders were in contact with each other throughout their assignments, so there is no doubt someone developed a pattern for mass murder at some point prior to the Soviet invasion. This included digging a large trench, lining up victims at the edge of the grave or lying on the ground, and then shooting victims in the neck.

Einsatzgruppe D: Committing Genocide in the Holocaust

Between June 1941 and June 1942, Ohlendorf commanded *Einsatzgruppe D* where he coordinated and implemented the murder of 91,678 Jews and partisans. The following summary of Ohlendorf's *Einsatzgruppe D* was given at the trial...

...During the first nine months of Ohlendorf's year in command of *Einsatzgruppe D*, this force destroyed more than 90,000 human beings. These thousands, killed at an average rate of 340 per day, were variously denominated Jews, gypsies, Asiatics, and "undesirables". Between 16 November and 15 December 1941, this *Einsatzgruppe* killed an average of 700 human beings per day for the whole 30-day period...³²⁷

Under Ohlendorf's command, *Einsatzgruppe D* was assigned to the southern Ukraine and attached to the Eleventh Army and, as such, conducted liquidations in major

³²⁷ TWC, 414-416.

cities along the route eastward. From Piatra-Neamt, Romania, *Einsatzgruppe D* launched a two-fronted assault going north through Černovitce Mogilev-Podalski, meeting the *EK* and *SK* at Odessa and Nikolayev. There, they branched through Ukraine to Stalino and cleared out Yalta and Simferopol in the Crimean Peninsula. The most significant number of casualties occurred at the major cities, while the smaller towns were likewise purged along the way. Although under Ohlendorf's command, *Einsatzgruppe D* killed 90,000 people, they killed fewer people than the other *Einsatzgruppen*. This is likely because the invading Wehrmacht had cleared the southern Ukraine before the *Einsatzgruppen* were deployed.

Historian Andrej Angrick has written the most comprehensive study of *Einsatzgruppe D* in *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941 – 1943*. He focuses on details of the 600 men in this task force, which he calls “badly understaffed,” and discusses unit selection, ideology, structure, and murder.³²⁸ Most importantly, Angrick shows that although their task was murder, they were not given much direction as to how to execute the so-called “Final Solution,” and the shootings were mostly improvised. *Einsatzgruppe D* formed *Sonderkommando* (SK10a and 10b) and *Einsatzkommando* (EK11a, 11b, and 12) to spread out from the battlefield to the rear of the Army. The SK and EK

³²⁸ There were nearly 3,000 men assigned to the *Einsatzgruppen* at any given time. Raul Hilberg gives the statistics of A- 1,000, B-655, C-700, and D-600. Angrick, “The Men of *Einsatzgruppe D*: An inside View of State-Sanctioned Killing Unit in the ‘Third Reich’” in Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann’s *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers: Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2008), 78-98. Reference on page 81.

groups also found the time to comb through asylums and hospitals to liquidate handicapped or mentally ill men, women, and children.³²⁹

Ohlendorf's *Einsatzgruppe D* also performed mass liquidations on scales as large as Babi Yar, although not necessarily as quickly. While the total for Ohlendorf's command was 90,000, there were massive executions at Piatra-Neamt (Romania), and Simferopol (Crimea); 35,782 were killed at Nikolayev (Ukraine), military execution-style, between September 16th and 30th 1941. Ohlendorf faced many challenges with his *Einsatzgruppe* division, namely the distinction between Crimean Jewish communities.



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³²⁹ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 86-87.

³³⁰ Wikimedia Commons contributors, "File:Karte - Einsatzgruppen in der Sowjetunion 1941.png, Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/b/b4/20150531214525%21Karte - Einsatzgruppen in der Sowjetunion 1941.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/archive/b/b4/20150531214525%21Karte_-_Einsatzgruppen_in_der_Sowjetunion_1941.png) (accessed June 13, 2017). The map inserted here has been cropped from the original file, which shows all four *Einsatzgruppen*. For more information on the movements of each *Einsatzgruppe* see Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm: *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges - Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1938–1942* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1981).

In Crimea, the Ashkenazis, Krimchaks and Karaites were, for the most part, resettled groups which had origins in Southern Russia and Central Asia, and held anti-Communist beliefs.³³¹ There was so much confusion over how to appropriately identify these Crimean Jewish groups that Ohlendorf wrote to Berlin to temporarily exempt them until the Reich could determine how to deal with them.³³² By December 1941, Berlin had written back, particularly regarding the Karaites, who “have nothing in common with the Jews except the confession.”³³³ This answer arrived after an incredibly detailed investigation of the ethnic history and migration of each group was compiled by the Reich.³³⁴ Warren Green argues that preferential treatment was given to the Karaites, who were evacuated as a Soviet-Turkic group, and notes that five to six hundred Karaites served in the Wehrmacht.³³⁵ The Ashkenazis and Krimchaks were eliminated, but the Karaites received a dispensation from the Nazis because the old tsarist system recognized them as non-Jewish.³³⁶

Both Ohlendorf’s issues with the Crimean Jews and how the Reich dealt with identification was bizarre. The Reich expended tremendous effort in determining

³³¹ Warren Green, “The Fate of the Crimean Jewish Communities: Ashkenazim, Krimchaks and Karaites”, *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 2. (Spring 1984), 169-176.

³³² Green, “Fate of the Crimean Jewish Communities,” 172.

³³³ TWC, Ohlendorf testimony, pp. 325-326.

³³⁴ *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, May 22, 1942 “Jews in the Crimea”, OSR 142, and several other OSR’s point to liquidation of particular towns as “judenrein,” but German communiqués discuss how there were a lot of survivors of the Crimean Jewish liquidation.

³³⁵ Green, “Fate of the Crimean Jewish Communities,” 173-174.

³³⁶ Green, “Fate of the Crimean Jewish Communities,” 172.

ethnic origins of the Crimean Jews, and although the Karaites had converted to Judaism centuries earlier, they were given a free pass because some of the population enlisted in volunteer units with the Tatars.³³⁷ Even so, Green notes that despite records of Crimea being *judenrein* (clean of Jews), German reports show some Askenazis and Krimchaks survived the pogroms and lived in hiding. He views contradictions in data as indicative of the need for further research. One solution to the question of why particular time was spent sparing the Karaites is that, among other counter-examples, the Germans took extra consideration for “negative repercussions” of murdering ethnic groups who held allegiance to Germany.³³⁸

In the three years after Ohlendorf’s tenure with *Einsatzgruppe D* was finished, the Red Army slowly advanced into Crimea, and the Karaites had to face the wrath of the Soviets for collusion with the Germans.³³⁹ Uncertainty over the ethnic origins of these particular groups troubled Ohlendorf, the efficient careerist; the Germans were “baffled” as to how to deal with the “Islamized” population of Jews in Crimea.³⁴⁰ For instance, the Tatars practically welcomed the Germans as liberators. Crimean Muslim groups fought alongside Ohlendorf and *Einsatzgruppe D*

³³⁷ Nicholas Stargardt, *The German War: A Nation Under Arms, 1939-1945* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 313.

³³⁸ Kiril Feferman, “Looking East or Looking South? Nazi Ethnic Policies in the Crimean and the Caucasus,” in Wendt, *Eradicating Differences*, 103-119.

³³⁹ Green, “Fate of the Crimean Jewish Communities,” 174-175.

³⁴⁰ Green, “Fate of the Crimean Jewish Communities,” 171. For more information on ethnic confusion see Warren Green, “The Nazi Racial Policy Toward the Karaites,” *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 7, no. 2 (1978), 36-44.

against the Soviets.³⁴¹ Their language was not Yiddish, Hebrew, or Russian, nor did they appear to the *Einsatzgruppe* to dress like Jews or practice the Jewish religion. Additionally, none of the other *Einsatzgruppen* had to deal with this particular problem, so Ohlendorf was left to initially improvise on unclear Reich orders.³⁴² Aside from Ohlendorf's problems distinguishing between ethnic groups in Crimea, there were instances of exemptions given to particular individuals. In an extensive part of his testimony, Ohlendorf was questioned about working through the city of Nikolaev where there were numerous Jewish farmers. He had made a determination that these particular farmers need not be liquidated, as they proved specifically valuable, saying in his defense:

I considered it more correct not to kill these Jews because the contrary would be achieved by this, namely, in the economic system of this country everything would be upset, which would have its effect on the operation of the Wehrmacht as well.³⁴³

As the prosecution pushed Ohlendorf to further explain himself, Judge Michael Musmanno tried to point out a contradiction in Ohlendorf's leadership and character. He was in charge of Jewish mass murder, but made the choice to exempt a group of farmers. The economic expert had justified to himself that these producers were essential to the survival of the Army in Crimea. Perhaps it was

³⁴¹ Anton Weiss Wendt, ed., *Eradicating Differences: The Treatment of Minorities in Nazi Dominated Europe* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), xi.

³⁴² For more on the relationship between the *Einsatzgruppen* and the Tatars see Alexander Dallin, *German Rule in Russia: 1941-1945* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), Alan W. Fisher, *The Crimean Tartars* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1978).

³⁴³ TWC, Ohlendorf testimony, 285-286.

because Ohlendorf was raised in a peasant farm family, and his upbringing made him more aware of their necessity. Either way, the court rightfully asserted a paradox in Ohlendorf's leadership, eventually leading to Judge Musmanno calling Ohlendorf "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."³⁴⁴

Women and Children

Some of the most heinous *Einsatzgruppen* activities concerned the treatment of women and children. When Ohlendorf was questioned about the necessity of killing women and children, he clearly stated that he found it reasonable and self-evident that German forces had to murder the dependents of enemies of the Reich so as to protect the German nation. Ohlendorf, husband and father of five children, tried to explain how he justified murdering women and children:

I believe that it is very simple to explain if one starts from the fact that this order [of Hitler] did not try and achieve security [temporarily] but also permanent security, because the children would grow up, and surely being the children of parents who had been killed, they would constitute a danger no smaller than that of the parents.³⁴⁵

Angrick adds that the *Freikorps* of WWI expressed the same sentiment, and to them, murdering Jewish Bolshevik offspring was "a prophylactic act of national self-defense in the face of future menace."³⁴⁶ This was not a novel way of thinking by the time Ohlendorf and the *Einsatzgruppen* had to deal with the prospect of murdering

³⁴⁴ Judgment, April 8, 1948, NARA, M-895, Einsatzgruppen Trial Transcript, Roll 7, 132.

³⁴⁵ TWC, vol. iv, p. 250.

³⁴⁶ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 89.

children. However, the emotional strain felt by *Einsatzgruppen* soldiers was something Ohlendorf considered when he said "...I never sanctioned shootings by individuals...I always gave orders for several people to shoot simultaneously, in order to avoid any individual having to take direct, personal responsibility."³⁴⁷ The Reich dealt with this problem by employing *Gaswagen*, gas vans.

Ohlendorf's testimony revealed that gas vans were sent to the *Einsatzgruppen* in early 1942, on Himmler's orders. They were "just like a box car" with no windows, heavy doors, and able to hold fifteen to thirty people.³⁴⁸ According to Ohlendorf, this method was utilized to ease the burden of soldiers personally having to kill women and children execution-style. This is significant, as it reveals that white-collar Nazi officials like Himmler seemed completely out of touch with the actual psychological effects troops experienced when committing genocide, let alone recognizing any effect on the people being murdered. Likewise, if Ohlendorf had not been transferred to the front, he would have undoubtedly thought the same way as Himmler. Ohlendorf claimed that Himmler issued the order for killing in gas vans to lessen the trauma for victims and soldiers alike, where "women and children were not to be exposed to the mental strain of the executions; and thus, the men of the Kommandos, mostly married men, should not be compelled to aim at women and children."³⁴⁹ He described the details as such:

³⁴⁷ Klee, Dressen and Riess, eds. *"The Gold Old Days,"* 60.

³⁴⁸ Tenenbaum, *"Einsatzgruppen,"* and TWC, Ohlendorf testimony, 3 Jan., 1946, 320-324.

³⁴⁹ TWC, Ohlendorf testimony, 3 Jan., 1946, 320-324.

The actual purpose of these vans could not be seen from the outside. They looked like closed trucks, and were so constructed that at the start of the motor, gas was conducted into the van causing death in 10 to 15 minutes. The vans were loaded with the victims and driven to the place of burial, which was usually the same as that used for the mass executions. The time needed for transportation was sufficient to insure the death of the victims. They were told that they were to be transported to another locality. [It took] about 10 to 15 minutes [to be killed]; the victims were not conscious of what was happening to them. [They held] about 15 to 25 persons. The vans varied in size.³⁵⁰

Ohlendorf later argued in affidavits and testimony that the gas vans were not reliable, and would often malfunction. To avoid the stress of his soldiers having to see the deceased victims before burial, the clean-up was left to local police groups and volunteers.

Therefore, the Reich transferred “specialists in extermination by gassing” like August Becker, Ph.D., a chemist in the RSHA, to inspect the use of gas in large-scale operations.³⁵¹ He said that in 1941 and after, the *Einsatzgruppen* were

³⁵⁰ TWC, Ohlendorf testimony, 3 Jan., 1946, 320-324.

³⁵¹ Dr. Becker had experience in the Reich’s euthanasia program. He was one of the founders of the Action T4 program, and by 1939, gas was used to involuntarily eliminate the handicapped and mentally ill patients of Germany. For more information on Action T4 see the previously footnoted Götz Aly and Peter Chroust, *Cleansing the Fatherland [Contributions to National Socialist Health and Social Policy]*, and Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: ‘Euthanasia’ in Germany 1900-1945*. See also Michael Burleigh, “Psychiatry, German Society and the Nazi ‘Euthanasia’ Programme,” In Omer Bartov *The Holocaust Origins, Implementation, and Aftermath*, Heinz Faulstich, *Hungersterben in der Psychiatrie 1914-1949: mit einer Topographie der NS-Psychiatrie* (Berlin: Lambertus, 1998), Maike Rotzoll, “Die nationalsozialistische ‘Euthanasie-Aktion T4’ und ihre Opfer: Geschichte und ethische Konsequenzen für die Gegenwart,” Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh (2010), Götz Aly, *Die Belasteten: ‘Euthanasie’ 1939-1945. Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (S. Fischer Verlag, 2013), Joachim-Ernst Meyer, “The fate of the mentally ill in Germany during the Third Reich,” *Psychological Medicine* 18, no. 3 (1988): 575-581, Edzard Ernst, “Killing in the Name of Healing: The Active Role of the German Medical Profession During the Third Reich,” *The American Journal of Medicine* 100, no. 5 (1996): 579-581, and Jutta Lindert, Yael Stein, Hans Guggenheim, Jouni JK Jaakkola, and Rael D. Strous, “How ethics failed—the role of psychiatrists and physicians in Nazi programs from exclusion to extermination, 1933–1945,” *Public Health Reviews* 34, no. 1 (2012): 8.

“complaining” about the stress of employing firing squad shootings. “I know that a number of members of these squads were themselves committed to mental asylums and for this reason a new and better method of killing had to be found.” He flew to *Einsatzgruppe D* to meet with Ohlendorf in January 1942, staying for three months to observe the use of the gas vans in Nikolaev and Simferopol. At that meeting, Becker said “I gave orders that all men should stand as far away as possible from the van during the gassings, so that their health would not be damaged by any escaping gases.” Understandably, the vans emitted lethal toxins to the outside, and anyone within a certain range could be harmed and suffer permanent damage. Dr. Becker reported that the men operating the vans suffered from headaches and trauma (post-traumatic stress) when they unloaded the vans themselves. After his inspection, he reported back to Berlin and “voiced criticism about the fact that the offenders had not been gassed but had been suffocated because the operators had set the engine incorrectly. I told him that people had vomited and defecated.”³⁵²

Ohlendorf was critical about the apparently complicated use of gas vans, and showed resentment for the Reich deploying them to his division as a “fix” for emotional stress and trauma for not only his soldiers, but the victims. He stated that the gas vans would produce too much mental strain, for “the picture presented by the corpses and probably because certain functions of the body had taken place leaving the corpses lying in filth,” his men would be traumatized.³⁵³ He much

³⁵² All quotations in this paragraph are from “Statement by August Becker, Ph.D., Gas Van Inspector”, in *The Good Old Days*, 68-71.

³⁵³ Hilberg, *Destruction*, op cit, pp. 209-210, TWC, Ohlendorf testimony 3 Jan. 1946, and Höhne *Death's Head*, 366.

preferred military-style executions in which individual soldiers had no contact with the victim; they fired together and thus, followed orders and were freed of feeling guilt. Heinz Höhne argued that the worst possible scenario would have been an uproar by the victims, with soldiers forced into “firing wildly” into the crowd with chaos ensuing.³⁵⁴ Ohlendorf’s job was to control the conditions of execution to maintain calm for victim and executioner alike. This did not include having to perform maintenance on faulty gas vans or unloading them, which revealed the “moment of truth from which Ohlendorf wished to save them.”³⁵⁵

What Ohlendorf’s experience with the gas vans reveals is twofold. The way he enacted genocide demonstrates the typical efficiency with which he conducted himself in other, more ordinary, government and academic jobs. He preferred the execution-style tactic of killing as a way to get the job done as quickly and mechanically as possible. The second issue exposed here is a sense of responsibility toward his troops, rarely seen elsewhere. He appeared to care for the well-being of his troops, not only to make sure they killed Jews and partisans, but also to ensure that they were spared from experiencing more emotionally traumatizing events, such as cleaning up the bodies of dead women and children murdered in the back of gas vans. To preserve order, and perhaps his own sanity, Ohlendorf oversaw a system designed to create the calmest possible scenario for victim and soldier alike.

³⁵⁴ Höhne, *Death’s Head*, 366.

³⁵⁵ Höhne, *Death’s Head*, 366. It is ironic, and slightly disturbing, that Höhne portrayed Ohlendorf as a gas van savior to his troops, although Ohlendorf certainly felt this way.

Granted, corralling innocent people, requiring them to undress, forcing them to lie on top of the already piled up corpses, and then executing them created no calm whatsoever. But for Ohlendorf, keeping the victims unaware of their fate until the very last moment was essential for him to establish and sustain efficiency.

Himmler did not concern himself with how the executions were carried out, even if there was no tangible way to control them. *Einsatzgruppen* soldiers were merely told that there were orders, and they were to be obeyed. It was in Ohlendorf's best interest to instill in his men how necessary it was to their own survival to conduct genocide. Thinking about how a person could participate in mass murder, not to mention kill women and children, historian Andrej Angrick asserts, "...to ask such people to understand their own doubts about the legality and appropriateness of the executions was beyond the mental horizons of many lower ranks."³⁵⁶ Ohlendorf was well aware of this and, in his mind, made the welfare of his soldiers of high importance when conducting genocide.

Conclusion

During Ohlendorf's leadership of *Einsatzgruppe D*, he demonstrated similar form and function as with his other efficient work in the Nazi government; in other words, the Dr. Jekyll persona. But the Mr. Hyde persona is shown by the fact that mass murder is not typical for a careerist. The conditions under which he was transferred, similar to those of the other *Einsatzgruppen* leaders, provide insight

³⁵⁶ Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, 90-91.

into Ohlendorf's motivations and mentality. He claimed to have twice refused this transfer, but in the end, benefitted greatly from it with all of the promotions an *Alter Kämpfer* should receive. Ohlendorf's case proves there was a communication breakdown seen in ill-defined directives leading to improvised killing tactics. It seems the SS was far more interested in numbers reported, than in how precisely and in which ways their unclear orders were enacted. However, Ohlendorf's association with the Anthroposophical society, personal and professional problems with Himmler and Heydrich, and the ill will created by his public opinion reports, despite being potentially legitimate reasons for the Reich wanting to send Ohlendorf away, are all based on circumstantial evidence. Ohlendorf's testimony and affidavits follow a distinct line of argument concerning his alleged disdain for being sent to the east. It is unclear to what degree he did not want the transfer, and which actual steps he took to avoid it. This information concerning his transfer was addressed at the Trial, and knowing that, it is imperative to look at a broader context, beyond his testimony. Examining the circumstances under which Ohlendorf was transferred shows that he was needed in the east, he was efficient, and was the ultimate careerist, willing to do anything for a promotion. His loyalty, particularly as an *Alter Kämpfer*, meant he was committed to the cause; this devotion overrode any other priorities.

Significantly, this study reveals another level of allowing the *Einsatzgruppen* (and military commanders) a fair amount of initiative in trying to attain overarching goals. The directives communicated to the *Einsatzgruppen* were ambiguous, and often unclear, leaving much room for improvisation. While the Wannsee Conference

provided a justification for perpetuating the so-called Final Solution, the way in which it unfolded for the *Einsatzgruppen* was much more problematic for its leaders. For example, Ohlendorf and other Nazis on trial claimed there were unwritten orders to which they were bound, and enacting mass murder was definitely improvised and evolved over a period of time. Looking at Ohlendorf's time in the *Einsatzgruppen*, it is clear that he, like the other leaders, was inexperienced with regard to military training and tactics, despite their six-week training at Pretzsch.³⁵⁷ Ohlendorf claimed that "in the presence of all the assembled *Einsatzgruppe* and *Sonderkommando* commanders [he] protested loud and clear against the order for mass execution" at Pretzsch.³⁵⁸ Although this is doubtful, on trial Ohlendorf tried to capitalize on the persona created by the adjutants, that of the cantankerous, oppositional, stubborn Ohlendorf. Yet, the Reich saw his transfer and that of his colleagues in the RSHA as an essential part of their careers, especially someone like Ohlendorf who already enjoyed a position of great privilege as an *Alter Kämpfer*. This fact indicates the contrary to his alleged protesting "loud and clear" against mass murder. So, true to his character, Ohlendorf reluctantly ascended to *Einsatzgruppe D* where, like his careerist objectives in the Nazi government, he excelled and successfully performed his "duties," clearing the southern Ukraine for the Reich. He was so successful, upon his return to the RSHA, the *Alter Kämpfer* ascended through promotions all the way to *SS Gruppenführer* (Major General).

³⁵⁷ Note that Richard Rhodes claimed the Pretzsch training time was only three weeks and it involved "minimal training" of either sitting in lectures or conducting terrain exercises that were dismissed as "games of hide and seek", *Masters of Death*, 11-12.

³⁵⁸ Ohlendorf's plea in mitigation, pp. 29-30, in Höhne, *Death's Head*, 359.

Chapter 5:

'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' on Trial

In 1946, Otto Ohlendorf first officially took the stand as the key defendant in a set of subsequent Nuremberg Trials bearing his name, Case 9, *The United States of America vs. Otto Ohlendorf, et al*; also known as the “*Einsatzgruppen* Trials.”³⁵⁹ To Ohlendorf’s surprise, the British Allied forces who accepted his surrender on May 23, 1945, were very interested in investigating his position in the Reich. These trials were instrumental in unveiling his leadership in *Einsatzgruppe D*. Initially, Ohlendorf did not offer any information on his career with the *Einsatzgruppen*, although eventually his affidavits revealed that he was responsible for the death of 91,678 people. The trial has been extensively analyzed, most recently by Hilary Earl. This chapter will not focus on procedure, but rather on issues central to understanding Nazi Germany and its war crimes, such as how racial policy became a means to defend enacting the Holocaust. The trial showcased Ohlendorf’s deep ideological commitment to National Socialism. In his own mind, he died a martyr for the cause.

Chief Justice Michael A. Musmanno’s characterization of Ohlendorf as “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” reflects important aspects of Ohlendorf’s character. His life as an intellectual academic led him to a privileged career with the Reich. However, the fact that he was on trial, composed, clear, and never faltering in the face of being

³⁵⁹ Note here that Hilary Earl takes great care to distinguish between the International Military Tribunal set of Nuremberg Trials, the one which tried Göring and Hess, and that this “subsequent” trial was not a military trial at all. It was conducted in civilian court but the Americans chose to call them “military.” Hilary Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 1-4.

condemned to death for war crimes and crimes against humanity forever changed his legacy. Dr. Jekyll was the National Socialist ideologue who believed in reform and success for Germany. Mr. Hyde was the murderous role he assumed when he commanded the *Einsatzgruppen* and led 90,000 innocent people to be slaughtered. However, Ohlendorf's ideological commitment and participation in the Holocaust were closely connected, and intertwined with his loyalty to the party. On June 7, 1951, after nearly six years in Allied captivity, he was sentenced to death by hanging for directing the mass murders committed by *Einsatzgruppe D*.³⁶⁰

It is important to highlight that Ohlendorf is well-known as a trial defendant and perpetrator of the Holocaust because legal proceedings and the trial itself have been extensively analyzed. Indeed, this is the aspect of Ohlendorf's life that is most widely referenced, in part because of how easily accessible his affidavits and testimony are. Transcripts have been digitized by the National Archives and institutions like the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), Yad Vashem, and the Jewish Virtual Library. Each have website sections where digitized copies of original documents exist for anyone to peruse. In the present digital age, a simple internet search of Ohlendorf's name will yield real trial footage on YouTube, as well as other resources in questionable forums. Ohlendorf at Nuremberg has

³⁶⁰ For some reason, some references state he was executed on June 8th, not the 7th. This essay cannot reconcile the discrepancy, but notes there is an issue over the precise date he was executed. However, in *Nuremberg*, Hilary Earl says he was executed "just after midnight" on June 7th, 1. Leon Goldensohn notes incorrectly that his birth year was 1908 when it was 1907 and gives June 8th as his date of death, Gellately, ed., *Interviews*, 386.

been repeatedly studied by lawyers, historians, psychologists, and experts of a variety of different fields. This analysis relies on each of the aforementioned transcripts and documents particularly *War Crimes Trials Records of Case 9 (WCT)*, *Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals (TWC)*, and NARA Record Groups 238, M895, and M1019 (microfilm).³⁶¹

This study attempts to avoid referring to Ohlendorf's testimony and affidavits as "confessions." It is incorrect to designate his statements a confession, because he certainly did not believe he was confessing to anything. Most of what is written about Ohlendorf and the trial states in some fashion that he confessed to murdering more than 90,000 Jews and partisans. This is misleading because not only did he believe in the moral right of what his *Einsatzgruppe* did, he never perceived these actions as criminal, and therefore never actually made a confession. The chief prosecutor Telford Taylor said of Ohlendorf's testimony that it was "in his mind not a confession but an avowal."³⁶² Trying to define Ohlendorf's acknowledgment of war crimes should be done bearing in mind that he did not believe enacting mass murder was a criminal act. To him, it was a governmental policy, albeit unpleasant, necessary and instrumental to the survival of the German race. However, he said "...there was certainly no logic in the leadership for raising this nonsense of the master race. The office for racial politics dealing with such

³⁶¹ Please refer to the "Primary Sources" section of the bibliography for more detailed information concerning the sources used for the trial.

³⁶² Telford Taylor, *Anatomy*, 248.

racial problems never represented this theory.”³⁶³ The perpetuation of the Aryan race was at the core of National Socialist ideology and practice, but Ohlendorf saw the Holocaust as an act of self-defense, free of any notions of “master race.”

Ohlendorf was part of the policy-making, meetings, and conversations about the survival of the Aryan race, but was frustrated when questioned by the prosecution. His frustration reflects his desire to escape condemnation for genocide.

Ohlendorf’s entire trial experience was, plainly, peculiar. The arguably handsome, intelligent, composed “Gralshüter” (keeper of the Holy Grail) of National Socialism always made an impression on the judges, lawyers, and observers.³⁶⁴ Judge Michael Musmanno noted peculiarities, such as whenever Ohlendorf was called to the stand, he drew a crowd of visitors including “women...some even sought to pass him notes offering encouragement.”³⁶⁵ He said this of Ohlendorf’s presence at the trial:

One of the most remarkable persons ever to appear before the public gaze...Handsome, poised, suave and polite, he carried himself with the bearing of a person endowed with natural dignity and intellect...forty years of age, slender and with delicate features and neatly combed dark brown hair, he looked out at the world through penetrating blue-grey eyes. His voice was excellently modulated...and he moved gracefully and self-confidently...the electric sensation of absolute authority...never deserted the young major-general... The only blemish in the perfection of his personality was that he had killed ninety thousand people.³⁶⁶

³⁶³ *TWC*, 281.

³⁶⁴ “Gralshüter des Nationalsozialismus” was the phrase coined by David Kitermann in his article published in 2000. See other sections for full reference.

³⁶⁵ Musmanno, *Eichmann Kommandos*, 106-107.

³⁶⁶ Musmanno, *Eichmann Kommandos*, 106-107, segments.

But not everyone was as impressed with Ohlendorf's appearance and how he carried himself. Tania Long, of the *New York Times*, reported Ohlendorf as such: "in appearance he is not particularly brutal or inhuman, looking more like a somewhat humorless shoe salesman one might meet anywhere."³⁶⁷ Telford Taylor called him "small in stature, young-looking, and rather comely... [who] spoke with dispassion, and apparent intelligence."³⁶⁸

At first glance, elements of Ohlendorf's testimony, including attempts at justifying the Holocaust, and the mentality behind his surrender, really do make him seem, as Hilary Earl put it, "delusional."³⁶⁹ Yet this analysis attempts to consider a more complete picture of Ohlendorf's character and thought-process seen in particular segments of testimony. He believed everything he did was moral, right, and completely justifiable in light of National Socialist ideology. Of course, his belief in the value of this philosophy must be viewed within the context of the 91,678 Jews and partisans murdered under his command. They were therefore his responsibility, as the leader, along with the officers and soldiers under his command. The crimes were his, no matter how he tried to justify them, and he was rightfully sentenced to death. However, whatever wrong he had done, he genuinely seemed to believe it was right.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁷ Tania Long, "Mass-Killing Chief," *New York Times*.

³⁶⁸ Taylor, *Anatomy*, 248.

³⁶⁹ Hilary Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 50.

³⁷⁰ Goldensohn, *Interviews*, 390, and Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 57.

Background

Upon his surrender, Ohlendorf assumed he could leverage his role as intelligence-gatherer in the Reich in a way that would gain him clemency. He also believed that he would assist the Allies in determining the new direction of Germany's government, having drafted a plan for economic recovery in the post-war era. Instead of focusing on elements of Ohlendorf's distinguished career in the Nazi upper echelons, his British captors flushed out his activities with the *Einsatzgruppen*. As the *Einsatzgruppen* reports surfaced, dispatches of the mobile killing squads detailing the numbers and ethnicities of persons who were deemed enemies of the Reich were discovered by a team of investigators, led by Benjamin Ferencz. Coupled with Ohlendorf's forthrightness in providing any information his captors wished, enough evidence was found to bring him and other surviving *Einsatzgruppen* personnel to trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

When the infamous Göring, Höss, and Speer Nuremberg Trial began, conducted by the International Military Tribunal, Ohlendorf was in American custody. He was brought in by the prosecution from that trial to testify against Ernst Kaltenbrunner, former head of the RSHA, who in turn claimed Ohlendorf was "one of my chief collaborators."³⁷¹ Ohlendorf's tidy appearance and ability to speak

³⁷¹ Ernst Kaltenbrunner assumed Heydrich's position following his death in 1942, as Chief of the RSHA and General of the Waffen – SS. He traveled with Himmler, to Mauthausen concentration camp to inspect the ways in which Jews were worked and killed, and was the person delegated to investigate the 20 July attempt on Hitler's life. For more on Kaltenbrunner see Peter Black, *Ernst Kaltenbrunner: Ideological Soldier of the Third Reich* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). This is the most comprehensive work on Kaltenbrunner's life, but in any of the Nuremberg Trial books, there are small sections of biographical information. Quote is from Kaltenbrunner's testimony, 12 Apr. 1946, *Nuremberg Trial Proceedings*, Volume 11, 321, and analyzed in Taylor's *Anatomy*, 361.

precisely contrasted starkly with Kaltenbrunner's harsh, "ominous-looking" appearance. It was a sound strategy to have Ohlendorf testify against Kaltenbrunner's initial denial of the existence of the *Einsatzgruppen*. Ohlendorf stated they operated under his authority.³⁷² He supposed his cooperation as a prosecution witness was winning him favor from his American captors, and at this point, it was not certain he would even be prosecuted for anything. He saw himself as more of an "expert witness" than a prisoner.³⁷³ That is, until the discovery of the *Einsatzgruppen* Reports, daily correspondences sent from the front detailing killings.³⁷⁴

As Ohlendorf was interrogated on multiple occasions over the course of nearly two years, sometimes for hours at a time, his memory of particular things became increasingly clear. When first debriefed by his British captors, he was slightly vague with details, names, and events. With the passing of months, and observing how the Nuremberg Trial was playing out, Ohlendorf merely added to what he had already sworn to in affidavits. Specifically, the more time he had to think about answering questions on the *Führerbefehl*, the more confidently he spoke about it, and the more the Americans accepted whatever Ohlendorf said as truthful.³⁷⁵ This is part of the Ohlendorf mystique. He was so honest and willing to

³⁷² Taylor, *Anatomy*, 360-361.

³⁷³ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 242.

³⁷⁴ Michael J. Bazyler and Frank M. Tuerkheimer, *Forgotten Trials of the Holocaust* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 165.

³⁷⁵ Earl, "Scales of Justice, 7 (of the essay separate from the anthology paging).

discuss answers to pointed questions under interrogation, and to give extra pertinent information, that the American tribunal appeared to blindly believe whatever he said. His defense lawyer, Dr. Rudolf Aschenauer, would have to adapt a defense strategy of having each defendant covered with the same tactic. In other words, the other defendants had to amend their testimony to corroborate anything Ohlendorf had already said. This would align the entire defense with one solid explanation of their crimes. Aschenauer and Ohlendorf knew this and thought he, as key defendant, would escape punishment.

Two sides of Ohlendorf's personality manifested themselves: the practical lawyer, soldier, and devoted servant of the Reich vs. the intellectual lawyer, adept at courtroom manipulation. Unfortunately for Ohlendorf, his arrogant, know-it-all, truth-teller, and utopian National Socialist outlook were inescapable elements of his character that cost him his life. Regardless, he could not and would not possibly deny his deeply rooted belief in National Socialism, and in his mind, he died a martyr for the cause.

Ohlendorf's testimony showcased his careerist nature, idiosyncratic personality, and lack of remorse, while also revealing perplexing aspects of the Nazi system and National Socialism under Hitler. The Reich had become a complex and paradoxical entity, one that gave promotions for committing atrocities, censored public opinion, and murdered the Jews of Europe. Part of the enigma is in the reasoning of those who believed that there was a so-called Führer Order for the Holocaust, allegedly handed down to the *Einsatzgruppen*, who then committed mass murder through improvisational techniques. If such a specific order existed as Reich

policy, how was it that ordinary Germans were allowed to exterminate Jews and partisans without much of a standard of accountability? There was a loose chain-of-command and some top-down oversight. For example, Ohlendorf was present at two mass executions for the purposes of inspection. What his role in the inspection actually entailed is unclear. What is certain, however, is that as long as the *Einsatzgruppen* reported that they were clearing out populations of Jews and partisans, the SS was satisfied.

No paper trail survived that actually implicated Adolf Hitler with the Holocaust. Ohlendorf and most other defendants on trial for war crimes named a specific order under which they were supposedly instructed to perform mass killings. They claimed they did it because they were ordered to, but no such specific order was ever found.³⁷⁶ In fact, the question as to whether or not there was any order at all unleashed the intentionalist/functionalist debate in historiography. It is doubtful such an order ever existed directly from Hitler. If in fact there was an order, it was probably given verbally so as to avoid any written proof. Anti-Semitism was ingrained as part of National Socialist ideology; policy-makers, logisticians, desk managers, and certainly the shooters and their commanders were all directly involved in the Holocaust.

³⁷⁶ Note here that although no written Führer Order was ever found, Heydrich's directives to the *Einsatzgruppen* are documented in German records and in the Operational Situational Reports, U.S.S.R., *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*. Even here, there was documented a goal of eliminating enemies to the Reich, Jews, Gypsies and partisans, but how it was carried out was not measured by the Reich. Reports were made back to Berlin, but they merely show death toll by date, city, region, ethnicity, and gender.

Reliable Testimony: An Oxymoron

Wading into the testimony of a condemned man is problematic. There are numerous reliable accounts contemporary to Ohlendorf and the trial that corroborate his continual forthrightness and honesty; Chief prosecutor Benjamin Ferencz said "...he was one of the very few men tried at Nuremberg who appeared to be telling the truth."³⁷⁷ Both under interrogation and with the prosecution, Ohlendorf's accounts of events and assessment of the Nazi regime never changed, even when he was interviewed while awaiting his execution. Although the facts provided in Ohlendorf's testimony were little challenged at the time, analyzing what he said at the trial and in captivity must be done carefully. Ohlendorf was educated in the law, and thus knew how to best manipulate the system, and how to portray his role in particular events in a certain light.

Other defendants, like Paul Blobel, leader of *Einsatzgruppe C*, cracked under the pressure of the trial, while Ohlendorf remained calm throughout the entire ordeal. Ever correct in his behavior, he even commended the tribunal in his final statement saying "...I will not conclude this final statement without expressing my gratitude for the very generous way in which you have treated the problems that we have considered important in these debates."³⁷⁸ Always a polite and courteous gentleman to his equals, at this point, Ohlendorf certainly knew he was going to be

³⁷⁷ Benjamin Ferencz, *Letter from Benjamin Ferencz to Michael. G. Shanahan*, July 7, RG 12.000 BBF Collection 1919-1994, WCT, Nuremberg Supplementary Material, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).

³⁷⁸ *TWC*, Otto Ohlendorf, "Final Statement of the Defendant," 13 February, 1948, 390.

condemned to death, and yet still thanked the court. Looking only at this particular statement, without understanding the context of his character and personality, one could simply assume that he was just another “willing executioner.” This is why investigating parts of his testimony, bearing in mind Ohlendorf’s belief system and *Alter Kämpfer* dedication, provides important insights into studying Nazi Germany and the Holocaust.

Ohlendorf’s goal was simple and fairly successful: to make himself indispensable. Whether it was simply his character and nature do to so, or as Ingrao more critically argues, that every word of his testimony was part of a master plan to create a fictional account, the goal was clear.³⁷⁹ Ohlendorf’s testimony was perceived as truth in the trial, and was used to measure the level of culpability of each other defendant in the *Einsatzgruppen* Trial, as well the trial of the original Nuremberg defendants. On every subject he was questioned about, Ohlendorf held information “of the highest importance in the eyes of his American interrogators” and this allowed for him to “at his leisure devise defense strategies to face down the accusations.”³⁸⁰ Ohlendorf really did put himself in the best possible position to gain leverage, if he were put on trial. Perhaps he was indeed delusional in collaborating so earnestly with his captors to offer information. There are both elements of calculation and honesty in Ohlendorf’s testimony, but the most probable explanation of his performance at the trial is that his ego was the ultimate victor. He

³⁷⁹ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 240 and 241.

³⁸⁰ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 242.

never betrayed his loyalty to National Socialism, and said he would commit the same atrocities all over again, without regret. This is what makes him the ultimate *Alter Kämpfer*.

Defense Strategy and Motivation

Ohlendorf held a degree in jurisprudence and was experienced in courtroom dynamics, on both the local and regional levels. Although he chose to testify on his own behalf, and represent himself in court, his official lawyer was Rudolf Aschenauer. Among many different themes present in Ohlendorf's affidavits, testimony, and interviews, the one which most stands out is consistency. In *The Nuremberg SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, Hilary Earl argues that during the trial, Judge Musmanno strove to delve deeper into the religious and moral beliefs of the defendants in order to better figure out perpetrator motivations.³⁸¹ Whenever Ohlendorf was asked about his family or personal life, he answered curtly, as if irritated by the questions, and doubting their relevancy to the trial. How could this husband and father of five children justify murdering innocent women and children? The answer he provided is simple: first, he never personally killed anyone and second, the very existence of those he ordered to be liquidated endangered the survival of his own family and country. A key aspect of National Socialist ideology was that the Reich was dependent on the destruction of the Jews.

³⁸¹ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 137-138.

A general analysis of defense strategies used by those on trial at Nuremberg have been divided into three categories by Earl: ideological soldiers, deniers, and conflicted murderers. The ideological soldiers justified their actions through National Socialist racial policy and by arguing that they were following military orders. The deniers devised a strategy of admitting to nothing. Finally, conflicted murderers either showed remorse for their actions, or demonstrated signs of moral conflict during the killing process.³⁸² Parts of Ohlendorf's testimony reveal that during the killings, he showed empathy for his soldiers, keeping them in a constant rotation, and providing them a sense of collective responsibility so that they would not carry the burden of murder alone.

Ohlendorf's defense strategy does not easily fit into one of Earl's three categories. His testimony, and those of his fellow defendants, heavily rode on his notions of "self-defense." This is how Aschenauer devised the tactic of acknowledging the mass executions, arguing that they were necessary to protect the survival of Germany against the threat of Bolshevism. Aschenauer declared the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen* to be "in presumed self-defense on behalf of a third party...under conditions of presumed necessity to act for the rescue of a third party from immediate, otherwise unavoidable danger."³⁸³ In other words, the third party was Germany, and the *Einsatzgruppen* leaders were simply trying to preserve the

³⁸² Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 142-145.

³⁸³ *TWC*, 462, and Earl, "Scales of Justice," 9-11.

survival of the Reich, and were in compliance with Soviet law.³⁸⁴ The problem with this line of defense is that it was never proven that Jews are sympathetic to the Bolshevik cause. This argument was similar to the one used to justify Operation Barbarossa: It was a preemptive attack in self-defense of Germany. Therefore, killing Jews and their children was an attempt to thwart an inevitable attack against Germany and prevent any future revenge killings. Following this logic, every citizen of the Soviet Union should have been subjected to murder, regardless of race, with the exception of those who were not members of the Communist Party.³⁸⁵ Clearly, this was not the case, and non-Communists were not spared.

Another aspect of his trial strategy was that Ohlendorf thought Field Marshall Erich von Manstein's testimony would absolve him from the indictment of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and membership in a criminal organization. *Einsatzgruppe D* was attached to the 11th Army, and although their directives were different in strategy and policy, Ohlendorf thought because of the association between the SS and Wehrmacht, that they would be tried in the same manner. He expected to be able to invoke the "*Saubere Wehrmacht*," or clean Army, defense just like Manstein did.³⁸⁶ He was wrong.

³⁸⁴ TWC, 462-464. It is ironic that Dr. Rudolf Aschenauer chose to base his defense on various and ample points of Soviet law. He argued these points because the *Einsatzgruppen* were operating in Soviet territory, in war zones, newly occupied by Germany, and that the defendants should be subjected to special aspects of occupation laws.

³⁸⁵ TWC, 464.

³⁸⁶ The concept of "clean Wehrmacht" (*Saubere Wehrmacht*) denoted the myth that the Army was superior to and had no knowledge of the actions of paramilitary groups. Reinforcing this myth resulted in the Army having completed WWII without extra blood on their hands, as it were, the Holocaust. Therefore, their reputation remained untarnished and leaders unscathed.

Although Ohlendorf was unable to fight for a military-type trial like Manstein, he argued the military defense throughout the trial. After all, he was given the title “Commissioner of the Chief of the Security Police and the SD attached to the 11th Army.” He was awarded military decorations, rank, and commendations, so it is not difficult to understand why he thought he would be tried as the military were. This is the most convincing part of Ohlendorf’s entire defense. If he could prove the Wehrmacht were aware of and assisted the *Einsatzgruppen* in their activities, he could have served a lighter sentence, or have his sentence altogether commuted, again like Manstein did.

On trial, Ohlendorf said he received his own “march and command orders” from the Army.³⁸⁷ In his testimony, Manstein denied ever having heard of the *Einsatzgruppen*, denied knowing Ohlendorf except for a fleeting moment, and refused to admit he was aware of the death of 90,000 Jews. When asked how he could not know, he aloofly claimed that all of this occurred outside of his jurisdiction. This is not entirely true, and surely broke Ohlendorf’s hope of having a military-type trial. However, as time has passed since the trial, there is much evidence, apparently inaccessible to Ohlendorf or the trial officials, that the *Einsatzgruppen* had received most of their equipment from the Army. On the other

For more information on “clean Wehrmacht,” see Wolfram Wette’s *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*. Of note, the Americans really helped perpetuate the concept of the “clean Wehrmacht” in the 1950s, the war effort of the German military was all but mythologized. See Ronald Smelser and Edward J. Davies II, *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 78-79. The *Einsatzgruppen* section of this essay first speaks of the clean Wehrmacht concept.

³⁸⁷ Käthe Ohlendorf, *Letter to David Irving*.

hand, there was an order issued on Himmler's authority, which discussed "special tasks." Dictated by Hitler to Field Marshall Wilhelm Keitel, "Instructions on Special Matters Attached to Directive No. 21" made sure that "*SS-Reichsführer*" Himmler assumed responsibility for the "special tasks," and that he act "independently and on his own responsibility."³⁸⁸ Despite various connections between the Army and the special tasks of the *Einsatzgruppen*, one could argue that Himmler's authority absolves the Army of complicity. This may be true, but for the Army to be tried completely separately from the *Einsatzgruppen* is problematic. There are too many connections between the operations of both groups.

Richard Rhodes cites several specific meetings between *SS* leaders that shed light on this question. For example, Walter Schellenberg, Wehrmacht Quartermaster General Wagner, and Heydrich all met and decided that the *Einsatzgruppen* were to operate under the supervision of the Wehrmacht on the front, although behind the lines they were completely independent.³⁸⁹ The Wehrmacht was also to provide fuel, rations, and other supplies to these task forces. Nonetheless, despite Ohlendorf and Aschenauer's best efforts to move for a military

³⁸⁸ Keitel's directive, 13 Mar. 1941, is cited in Richard Rhodes, *Masters of Death*, 14.

³⁸⁹ Rhodes, *Masters of Death*, 14-16. The TWC also discussed a meeting between Wagner, Schellenberg, and Heydrich, 66. Walter Schellenberg was the head of Nazi Foreign Intelligence and Hitler's Chief of Counterintelligence. For more information on his life, the Reich, and his relationship with leaders like Ohlendorf, see Walter Schellenberg, *The Labyrinth: Memoirs of Walter Schellenberg, Hitler's Chief of Counterintelligence* (Boston: DaCapo Press, original reprint, 2000), and Walter Schellenberg, *Walter Schellenberg: The Memoirs of Hitler's Spymaster* (London: André Deutsch, 2006 edition).

trial, and regardless of the evidence supporting their claim, it was a failure. The cloud of Ohlendorf's war crimes trumped anything else.

Lastly, as previously discussed in the *Einsatzgruppen* section, the circumstances of Ohlendorf's transfer served his own personal defense well. He very aptly played the role of the intellectual who twice refused being transferred, and was finally transferred against his wishes. For Ohlendorf, being an *Alter Kämpfer* helped determine his career path, but at the trial, he stated numerous times that he did not want to go to the Eastern Front. He had fallen into disfavor with Himmler and ended up complying "only to avoid the reproach of cowardice."³⁹⁰ He portrayed himself, to an extent, as the victim of circumstance whose ideological fanaticism did not give him any desire to murder anyone, yet he was coerced into joining the *Einsatzgruppen*.

Ingrao argues that Ohlendorf portrayed himself as a party activist who was unfairly "marginalized" and his transfer was a means to "destroy him psychologically."³⁹¹ In direct cross-examination, Ohlendorf insisted that his assignment was "involuntary" and ardently stated that disobeying the Führer "would have met immediate death."³⁹² Throughout the trial, the defense was unable

³⁹⁰ Heinz Höhne, *Death's Head*, verbal conversation with Käthe Ohlendorf, 26 Jan. 1966, cited on p. 357 and 620 (n).

³⁹¹ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 243 and *TWC*, Ohlendorf testimony, 8 Nov. 1947.

³⁹² See Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 203 and *TWC*, Ohlendorf testimony, 8 October, 1947, roll 2, 521-527. Earl points out that Ohlendorf contradicted himself when he spoke of disobeying orders, a week later, testified that he gave allowances to his troops and sent them back to Berlin if they were mentally unfit to handle the mental strain of performing such executions. See Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, footnote 106 on page 203.

to prove this statement either true or false. Yet, the most pressing issue for the prosecution was about the nature of how the number 90,000 came about.

The Number: 90,000

Ohlendorf himself admitted that under his nine-month command in the Soviet Union, *Einsatzgruppe D* exterminated 90,000 people. In affidavits, testimony, and every other time he was questioned, he gave 90,000 as the total figure. Given that, according to the *Einsatzgruppen* Reports, also known as Operational Situational Reports, U.S.S.R., 91,678 was the total number cited to date by *Einsatzgruppe D*, the accuracy of Ohlendorf's original 90,000 went uncontested.³⁹³ Ohlendorf was asked to verify the figure of 90,000 during cross-examination by James Heath, who said, "I understood you to suggest to the Court that this figure is exaggerated although it appears in an affidavit which you have given."³⁹⁴ Ohlendorf replied:

In my direct examination I have already said that I cannot give any definite figure, and that even the testimony in my affidavit shows that in reality I could not name any figure.

³⁹³ See *TWC*, Ohlendorf testimony, 321, for instance, and USDIC (UK), 30 Sept 1945 for two particular instances of Ohlendorf stating 90,000. The prosecution team, headed by Benjamin Ferencz and under the leadership of General Telford Taylor, had researchers find the *Einsatzgruppen* reports and this, coupled with Ohlendorf's statements and affidavits given to both British and American intelligence services, was the evidence they desperately needed to move forward with the "*Einsatzgruppen* Case." Also note that the number 91, 678 comes from "Operational Situational Report USSR No. 190," dated 8 Apr., 1942, from *Einsatzgruppe D* at Simferopol saying "to date, 91,678 have been shot." See Arad, Krakowski, and Spector, eds. *The Einsatzgruppen Reports*, 325-326. If Ohlendorf's estimate of 90,000 killed was insufficient to the court, this particular document confirmed it. Also, previously discussed in this paper, is the issue over Ohlendorf's claim that the numbers in the OSR's were inflated by his fellow defendants. See the "*Einsatzgruppen*" section for more.

³⁹⁴ *TWC*, "Cross-Examination," 269.

Therefore, I have named a figure which has been reported 'approximately.' The knowledge which I have gained by this day through the documents and which I have gained through conversations with my men, make me reserve the right to name any figure and strengthen this reservation. Therefore, I am not in a position to give you a minimum figure, either. In my direct examination I have said that the numbers which appear in the documents are at least exaggerated by one-half, but I must repeat that I never knew any definite figure and, therefore, cannot give you any such figure.³⁹⁵

Heath, unrelenting, asked again if he exaggerated the reports "which you sent to the Reich Security Main Office," to which Ohlendorf replied "I certainly did not on my own initiative, but I had to rely on those things which were reported to me, and I know that double countings could not be avoided, and I also know that wrong numbers were reported to me."³⁹⁶ He also explained that his *Einsatzkommando* units reported on killings "carried out by other units." Here the prosecution attempted to tie Ohlendorf down to the number 90,000. Ohlendorf stated that his units exaggerated the reports with "fifteen to twenty percent double countings," and added this from his previous affidavit on 3 January 1946: "the 'approximately' must have meant that I was not certain," referring to previous affidavits recording the number 90,000 he cited. Also from the affidavit, Heath read Ohlendorf's testimony to him aloud;

It is evident that I mentioned this number of ninety thousand by adding a number of other figures. I do not mention this in order to excuse myself, as I am perfectly convinced that it does not matter from the actual fact whether it was forty thousand or ninety thousand. I mention this for the reason that in the situation in which we are today, politically speaking, figures are being dealt with in an irresponsible manner.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ TWC, "Cross-Examination," 269.

³⁹⁶ TWC, "Cross Examination," 273.

³⁹⁷ TWC, "Cross-Examination," 273 and "Affidavit", 3 Jan. 1946, 317.

The series of questions by the prosecution and responses by Ohlendorf demonstrate how initially, while in custody, Ohlendorf's story became increasingly specific. In the beginning, he was vague, but still was able to rattle off the figure of 90,000 for the total killed under his command. However, in the previous dialogue, Ohlendorf seems to attempt to extricate himself from being tied to the figure 90,000, citing exaggerations and incorrect numbers from the *Einsatzkommandos*, and generally trying to distance himself from the number. He was unsuccessful, and due to OSR 190, Ohlendorf was eternally bound to the statistic 91,678. He was correct in saying forty thousand of ninety did not matter; in fact, it did not. Because the court researchers authenticated the Operational Situational Reports, the figures were accepted as true, and no defendant could talk his way out of them. The introduction to the published *Einsatzgruppen Reports* stated "during the first days of the *Einsatzgruppen* Trial, the authenticity of the reports was established beyond doubt, after which the German defendants did not challenge their validity" - except for Ohlendorf's claims of inflated numbers.³⁹⁸

Two items are of particular note regarding the number 90,000. Firstly, Ohlendorf was probably correct that the *Einsatzkommandos* included numbers from "other" units. In fact, the *Einsatzgruppen* were extremely successful in rounding up, registering, and performing executions on a mass scale. Without the help of local authorities, this task would have proven more challenging. The *Einsatzgruppen* enlisted local help, sometimes through voluntarism or sheer brute force and

³⁹⁸ Arad, Krakowski, and Spector, eds., *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, "Introduction," xiii.

coercion, to cooperate with mass killings. For instance, Ohlendorf worked closely with the Tatars in Crimea, who assisted in mass murder and did so “freely” by offering “their services to the Germans” and “where troops and armed Tatars were available, actions were undertaken.”³⁹⁹ There are many other instances of local cooperation in pogroms like Babi Yar throughout the documents associated with the *Einsatzgruppen*. In sum, the killings reported were probably not all performed by German *SS-Einsatzgruppen* draftees and volunteers.

The second issue deals more with Ohlendorf’s character. The quintessential careerist had an unblemished record of excellence. While composing the *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, public opinion reports, or as Reich economic functionary, or even with his brief stint in academia, one thing is certain about Ohlendorf: his career was founded and sustained on principles of honesty, accuracy, loyalty, and efficiency. It was these qualities that he claimed resulted in having him transferred, as his superiors disliked the blunt honesty and meticulousness with which he carried out tasks. There is little doubt Ohlendorf would have taken every possible measure to ensure the accuracy of each OSR. Even if he indeed relied upon his

³⁹⁹ *Einsatzgruppen Reports*, “Operational Situational Report USSR, No. 157,” 285. Note that the Tatars were a Turkic group who settled in Crimea centuries prior to its’ Nazi occupation. Ohlendorf’s reports consistently cite the Tatars as an ethnic group, fearful of Russian reoccupation of Crimea, who welcomed the Germans and cooperated in exterminating the Jews, Gypsies, and partisans from the region. In her letter to David Irving, Ohlendorf’s wife Käthe made sure to mention he worked with the Council of Tatars, and they were happy to work together, most likely to rid the region of Russians. See Käthe Ohlendorf, *Käthe Ohlendorf Letter to David Irving*, March, 30, 1979. *Institute für Zeitgeschichte München*, 25-2356-1. For more information on the Tatars in World War II see David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany’s War* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2014), for the history of the Tatars and involvement with the Nazis, Brian Glyn Williams, *The Crimean Tatars: The Diaspora Experience and the Forming of a Nation* (Brill, Netherlands: Brill’s Inner Asia Library, 2001), and Anton Weiss Wendt, ed., *Eradicating Differences*.

Einsatzkommandos to compile statistics, he would have made certain they knew he wanted his reputation for expediency and accuracy to remain intact. Given that Ohlendorf could not physically be present at every single execution, nor count each individual corpse, he had to entrust his *Einsatzkommando* leaders with taking tallies. But the fact of the matter is this: if Ohlendorf disagreed with memos and statistics sent back to Berlin, with his name and *Einsatzgruppe* undersigned, his sense of professionalism would have prevented him from signing off on such reports. He did not object, and so, performed his tasks as leader of *Einsatzgruppe D* in accordance with the rest of his professional life, with precision, and accuracy.

Führerbefehl and Conscience

There is a major flaw in Ohlendorf's testimony. Regarding the presence of the so-called *Führerbefehl*, Führer's order, Ohlendorf lied. About the *Führerbefehl*, Christian Ingrao argues that Ohlendorf, here, was "setting out a fiction that would have a long series of consequences... [and] attributing the guilt to a dead man relieved the survivors of their responsibilities."⁴⁰⁰ When questioned about *Einsatzgruppen* directives after Operation Barbarossa, he stated that there was a prior order in place to murder the Jews, saying "Himmler told me that before the

⁴⁰⁰ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 240 and 241. The "dead man" is not only Hitler in Ingrao's argument, but Ohlendorf also blamed Bruno Streckenback for delivering Hitler's orders, and Himmler for their participation in conducting the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen*. Ingrao points to a larger picture of Ohlendorf's testimony that was carefully produced because he feared that reports from Pretzsch or papers not destroyed from Heydrich's office in the RSHA would be in the hands of the Americans.

beginning of the Russian Campaign Hitler had spoken of this mission.”⁴⁰¹ Also mentioned here should be the existence of the Barbarossa Decree and the Commissar Order, which prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union, mandated that the Wehrmacht kill all Soviet political prisoners and Bolshevik sympathizers. According to Ohlendorf, the order said: “...the Security Police and SD, the *Einsatzgruppen* and the *Einsatzkommandos* had the mission to protect the rear of the troops by killing the Jews, gypsies, Communist functionaries, active Communists, and all persons who would endanger the security.”⁴⁰² Ohlendorf lied, and this was a major part of his defense strategy. After all, he was thought to be fairly honest, and because the Americans believed him, they took his definition of *Führerbefehl* as fact.

The difficulty here is that Ohlendorf dictated the “facts” of the trial. In “Scales of Justice,” Earl argues that because Ohlendorf was relatively honest and forthcoming in giving testimony, the prosecution and judges cared less about when he said the order was issued. For Earl, the issue concerns the willingness of the tribunal to accept what Ohlendorf said as fact because “perjury appeared to be beneath him.” This made him a credible witness, and historians have traditionally accepted his testimony as correct and factual, sometimes including the *Führerbefehl*.⁴⁰³ No one at the trial disputed Ohlendorf’s definition of the

⁴⁰¹ TWC, Ohlendorf testimony, 3 Jan. 1946, 317.

⁴⁰² TWC, 244.

⁴⁰³ Earl, “Scales of Justice,” 2-4, and Lawrence Douglas, “Wartime Lies: Securing the Holocaust in Law and Literature,” in F.C. Decoste and Bernard Schwartz (eds.), *The Holocaust’s Ghost: Writings on Art, Politics, Law and Education* (Edmonton, Alberta: The University of Alberta Press, 2000), 17-18.

Führerbefehl, because his testimony was not subjected to much scrutiny. Therefore, what Ohlendorf said during the trial and his captivity has determined what is known about the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen* and the destruction of the Eastern European Jewry from 1941. However, historians now overwhelmingly reject the notion that there ever was a *Führerbefehl*.

A significant issue addressed at the trial was that of the conscience and morals of Ohlendorf and the other defendants. Yet Ohlendorf repeatedly dodged any question concerning the morality of the orders to kill. Analyzing instances of the prosecution, together with Musmanno, attempting to draw out Ohlendorf's opinions of the so-called *Führerbefehl* demonstrate his skill in avoiding emotive testimony. The most significant display of the prosecution's attempt to gauge Ohlendorf's morality leads back to the line of questioning about the murder of women and children.

The prosecution repeatedly attempted to force Ohlendorf to make a moral judgment concerning the murder of 90,000 innocent civilians. Regarding the order to kill women and children, Ohlendorf constantly avoided making a moral claim about it. Instead, he pointed to the fact that in the war itself, countless children were killed by air strikes. In fact, he tried to distance himself from this aspect of *Einsatzgruppen* activity saying, "I myself never saw children being shot," but acknowledged he knew that women and children were indeed killed when he said "the reports also revealed the execution of children."⁴⁰⁴ Goldhagen asserts that when questioned about judging his own behavior and participation in mass murder,

⁴⁰⁴ TWC, 327 and 356.

had he “disregarded the Führer Order, Ohlendorf would have transgressed the law as well as his own moral code.”⁴⁰⁵ As an *Alter Kämpfer*, Ohlendorf would never have compromised his devotion to National Socialism. Inherent in this ideology was the inevitability that Germany could not thrive unless “other” inferior groups of people no longer threatened the survival and expansion of the Aryan race.

Nevertheless, in the quest to understand the mentality of Nazi perpetration, the prosecution was unrelenting, and again posed the issue of morality of orders. This time, it was regarding the murder of women. Prosecutor James Heath suggested to Ohlendorf “let’s suppose the order had been that you should kill your sister.” After Aschenauer’s objection, and Ohlendorf also trying his best to throw the question out as irrelevant, eventually he responded in the positive: “If the demand would have been made to me under the same prerequisites that is within the framework of an order, which is absolutely necessary militarily, then I would have executed that order.”⁴⁰⁶

Goldhagen argues that Ohlendorf’s “conscience” dictated how he dealt with his own troops.⁴⁰⁷ At the trial, Ohlendorf reiterated a conversation with Himmler, from Nikolaev, Ukraine, saying he directly opposed the killing of civilians. “...I

⁴⁰⁵ Goldhagen, “The ‘Humanist’,” 33.

⁴⁰⁶ *TWC*, 310. This is, quite possibly, the most staggering moment during the entire trial. Ohlendorf admitted he would have his own sister killed, if he was ordered to. This particular part of the testimony is most referenced in secondary literature signifying how devoted to the Führer, National Socialism, and the cause Ohlendorf actually was. For Goldhagen, he assessed that to Ohlendorf, the “order was inviolable,” 34.

⁴⁰⁷ Goldhagen, “The ‘Humanist’,” 35.

pointed out the inhumane burden which was being imposed on the men in killing all these civilians. I didn't even get an answer."⁴⁰⁸ When Ohlendorf could not mitigate the orders, he found other ways to lighten the burden for his soldiers. This is demonstrated in ideas of collective responsibility, demanding they shoot in tandem, and in the use of gas vans.⁴⁰⁹ Ohlendorf portrayed himself as a sincere and caring leader, "a man of conscience and integrity," who genuinely affirmed the well-being of his troops.⁴¹⁰ Ohlendorf's moral conscience was a predicament for him, as revealed in an exchange between himself and James Heath:

Ohlendorf: Well, I believe there is no doubt that there is nothing worse for people spiritually than to have to shoot defenseless populations.

Heath: If I may be a little facetious in a grim manner, there is nothing worse than to be shot either, when you are defenseless?

Ohlendorf: Since this is meant ironically by you, I can imagine worse things, for example, to starve.

Heath: It is not meant entirely ironically. I have read the whole of your testimony, and I am impressed by the fact that not once did you express any sympathy or regret.⁴¹¹

Although Musmanno reprimanded Heath for commenting on Ohlendorf himself, this excerpt from the trial perfectly demonstrates two points: First, Ohlendorf was consistent and unwavering in his testimony throughout the entire process. Second, it clearly shows how Ohlendorf committed his careerist nature to the method of

⁴⁰⁸ TWC, 251.

⁴⁰⁹ For more of a discussion on the use of gas vans, see the *Einsatzgruppen* chapter of this essay.

⁴¹⁰ Goldhagen, "The 'Humanist'," 35-37.

⁴¹¹ TWC, 279.

murder. In this process, he cared not for those being murdered, but more for the way in which they were killed and the well-being of his troops, their killers.

In Ohlendorf's mind, during his assignment with the *Einsatzgruppen*, he was a soldier, and a leader of soldiers. In the trial, he wholeheartedly accepted responsibility for the actions of his *Einsatzgruppe*, although he made sure to comment that he never personally actually killed anyone. For Ohlendorf, if the trial were to tarnish his reputation, as someone who did much good work for the Reich, at least he wanted to be remembered as a devoted leader, one who was sympathetic to the needs of his men. Knowing he followed superior orders, excelling and performing as best he could, and believing he served his troops "humanely" and with care, by paying for *their* crimes, "he went down with the ship," to use the Victorian maritime idiom.

Sentencing

The longest closing statement from any witness in any of the Nuremberg-related trials was Ohlendorf's, on 13 February 1948. Like his opening statement, he gave a long-winded, carefully constructed speech that touched upon historical concepts, Christianity, enemies, and the history and legacy of Germany. However, unlike his opening statement, there is an element of emotion in parts of his speech saying:

...I have said time and again that I was tormented by the fear of punishment which those in Germany who were responsible for the historic development seemed to invite by their words and deeds. Their frank ignoring of human lives, and of the basic ideas of their own religious and moral conceptions of the people made this fear grow in me, but today my fear of future punishment invited by present day events is greater still...

This passage reveals something in Ohlendorf unseen anywhere else: fear. When he is talking about human lives, torment, morals and punishment, he is reflecting on what was wrong with embarking on the Holocaust, although he never calls it that. But here he is also maintaining his innocence, and separating himself from “those” who ignored “human lives.” At the same time, he uses the word fear twice. This is credible because although he was a devoted believer in National Socialist ideology, he was probably affected by becoming a perpetrator, and this haunted him. He goes on to say...

...They [the defendants] entered on their task convinced that they were backed by a genuine and justified moral force. They felt that their work was necessary even if it opposed their own inner tendencies and interest, because the existence of their people was in deadly peril. They were the same good average citizens as you find them by the millions in all countries. They never thought of criminal activities or criminal aims...They were in no position to judge the methods and necessity of this war...But the passion of their moral existence included the metaphysical stipulation that the existence of their people must be preserved...⁴¹²

Although Ohlendorf is clearly trying to preserve what little he can of himself and his deeds, one can at least better understand how he justified his crimes. He almost seems to admit that the perpetration of murder weighed heavily on him--enough to speak of conscience and morals. These passages have a different tone, more like that of a condemned man, than any other part of his testimony in the trial. One has to wonder when it actually became apparent to Ohlendorf that he was not going to come away from this trial without being sentenced, perhaps even to death. There is a human element to this final statement worth further discussion. He repeatedly referred to “they.” The “they” here are his fellow defendants, and possibly the

⁴¹² TWC, “Final Statements of the Defendants: Ohlendorf,” 384-390.

German people as a whole. Perhaps observing their actions and attitude in court convinced Ohlendorf he should speak on behalf of everyone in the dock. Ingrao argues that, by this time, Ohlendorf was clearly aware that he was in “grave danger.”⁴¹³ He knew the possibility of being found guilty at the beginning of the trial, but his closing statement reveals he understood this was likely going to be the decision of the court.

For Musmanno, it was clear that he would have to impose death sentences. He noted how his entire career as a defense lawyer he had fought against the death penalty: “the thought of ending their [the defendant’s] lives filled him with dread.”⁴¹⁴ On April 10, 1948, Ohlendorf was brought in for sentencing. At this point, he may have hoped for some leniency in sentencing, but knew he would surely face punishment. He was indeed found guilty on all three charges, and was sentenced to death by hanging. He did not react outwardly, seemed indifferent, and then bowed to show his respect for the court proceedings before he left the courtroom.⁴¹⁵ He did not know that he would have to wait for more than three years for the sentence to be carried out.

⁴¹³ Ingrao, *Believe and Destroy*, 243.

⁴¹⁴ Musmanno, *Eichmann Kommandos*, 147-148 and Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 261-262.

⁴¹⁵ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 264, and Ferencz lectures.

On Death Row

In the three years between the delivery of Ohlendorf's death sentence and his execution, he had ample time to settle his affairs, give interviews, appeal the decision, compile evidence of his alleged innocence and write a testimonial. He kept quite busy for a man on death row. With the help of Aschenauer, Ohlendorf appealed for clemency based on the argument that the number, at the time one million, of atrocities the court compiled for the whole *Einsatzgruppen* were inflated by more than 50%.⁴¹⁶ For Ohlendorf and Aschenauer, if one of the goals of this trial had been to gain truth and create an "historical record," he should be pardoned.⁴¹⁷ This is because the precise numbers were called into question. The defense claimed that if the numbers were not correct, this could have a tremendous bearing on the validity of evidence submitted by the prosecution, and attested to by other members of the *Einsatzgruppen* trial defendants. Likewise, the defense argued that not taking into account the other tasks of the *Einsatzgruppen* besides killing was a "distortion of the truth."⁴¹⁸ In Earl's view, the goal of attaining the "truth" was an impossible task. Certainly, there were documents and reports that revealed truths about the actions of the *Einsatzgruppen*. But Musmanno and the organizers of the trial made it paramount that they gain an understanding of the mentality of murder. In

⁴¹⁶ TWC, Ohlendorf, "Petition for Clemency," 26 Apr. 1948, 7-8, in NARA G 466, "Petitions for Clemency or Parole at Nuremberg."

⁴¹⁷ TWC, Ohlendorf, "Petition for Clemency," and Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 268-269.

⁴¹⁸ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 268-269.

retrospect, Ohlendorf did not tell the complete truth. Not that he should ever have been acquitted from committing heinous, deliberate genocide, but it is important to realize the evidence behind the prosecution, in the case of using Ohlendorf's testimony as "truth" was compromised from the very beginning.

Not surprisingly, there were people and organizations which came out against the Nuremberg judgments, especially the German Catholic Church.⁴¹⁹ In fact, by 1958, most of the sentences of those tried and jailed in all of the Nuremberg war crimes trials were commuted. Through Aschenauer, Ohlendorf, along with other convicted defendants, continued the appeals process over the course of three years. John J. McCloy became head of the High Commission in Germany to re-evaluate the prisoners, like Ohlendorf, still on death row.⁴²⁰ He established the Advisory Board

⁴¹⁹ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, has an entire section entitled "Opposition to the Nuremberg Judgments." She outlines in detail how and to what degree the sentenced defendants had people on the outside rallying for their release. This is, in part, because Aschenauer campaigned for their release, helped raise money for the families of the defendants, and for the cost of maintaining their petitions for clemency. Also, in the post-war period, having trials of German atrocities conducted by a third party, i.e. the Americans, was a hostile act to some people and denounced as such. Even Ohlendorf rebutted against the trial process. For more on the help of the clergy, see Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2000) and "The German Catholic Church after the Holocaust," in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 2:10 (Fall 1996), 151-167.

⁴²⁰ McCloy had already served as Secretary of War during World War II, was president of the World Bank for two years, and was appointed the United States High Commissioner to oversee the new establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany. He was much more moderate in reviewing clemency petitions and commuting sentences of the Nuremberg defendants than his predecessor. Earl argues that he was under an enormous amount of pressure from German officials to be lenient to those prisoners still on death row. For more information on his life see Kai Bird, *The Chairman: John J. McCloy and the Making of the American Establishment* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992) and Thomas Alan Schwartz, *America's Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

on Clemency, which was tasked with reviewing and, if warranted, amending the Nuremberg prisoner sentences. McCloy was pressured by German officials and the United States government to maintain a good relationship with Germany so as to promote German recovery. He and the board reassessed the defense of the Nuremberg prisoners, and in their deliberations, took into consideration their physical condition and family situations.⁴²¹

This began in 1950, after Aschenauer's many failed attempts at appeal, but McCloy himself did not review the cases until January 31, 1951.⁴²² The lag in time was most likely because of the outbreak of the Korean conflict and increased pressure on McCloy to hasten the process of rebuilding Germany as a Cold War ally. A *New York Times* article from 1950 reveals precisely how giving Ohlendorf clemency would invoke political repercussions. Granting "clemency would be oil to the Kremlin's propaganda machine; also, [that] it would have a reassuring effect on Nazi front organizations, while weakening the hand of our democratic friends, not the least of all Germany."⁴²³ With the recommendations from the Advisory Board, McCloy ruled to commute all but five prison sentences from the *Einsatzgruppen* trial. Neither the board members, nor McCloy, were lenient on Ohlendorf. He was one of the five whose sentences remained untouched. Ohlendorf was furious and said this decision would, indeed, make him a "martyr," since so many other perpetrators

⁴²¹ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 281-282.

⁴²² Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 284-285.

⁴²³ "Ghosts from Nuremberg," *New York Times*, February 6, 1950.

were either not tried, not punished, or given clemency.⁴²⁴ Telford Taylor said of this decision: “The result of these and related developments was a rapid decrease of political interest in war crimes matters and eventually a desire to put an end to trials and liberate war criminals still in captivity.”⁴²⁵ That is, except for Otto Ohlendorf.

After receiving the devastating news that most of his fellow defendants had their sentences commuted or reduced, Ohlendorf wrote to Princess Helene Elisabeth von Isenburg, and Cardinal Aloisius Muench, two powerful people who were known for their sympathy toward the Landsberg prisoners. Muench was hesitant to support Ohlendorf’s claims of being tried unjustly because of the massive amount of evidence that he was responsible for killing 90,000 Jews and partisans. However, “Mother Elisabeth” wrote numerous letters back to Ohlendorf and determined that “as I got to know him, I was shocked to discover the false picture created by propaganda in this case.”⁴²⁶ She also wrote to Aschenauer, had meetings on Ohlendorf’s behalf, and was a founding member of the Association for Truth and

⁴²⁴ Earl, *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*, 286, and Raul Hilberg, *Destruction of the European Jews*, 1079-1080.

⁴²⁵ Taylor, *Anatomy*, 640.

⁴²⁶ Von Isenberg quoted in Suzanne Brown-Fleming, *The Holocaust and Catholic Conscience: Cardinal Aloisius Muench and The Guilt Question in Germany* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), see chapter 4 for more information on the people who wrote to Muench on Ohlendorf’s behalf and why he decided not to support clemency for Ohlendorf. Von Isenburg was part of the *Bund für Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit*. See also Larry V. Thompson (ed.) *Lesson and Legacies Volume IV: Reflections on Religion, Justice, Sexuality, and Genocide* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2003). The most comprehensive work on the post-war relationship between Landsberg prisoners and the Catholic Church is by Brown-Fleming.

Justice. However, the United States thought of this group as an organization of Nazi sympathizers. The fact that Cardinal Muench decided not to help Ohlendorf's cause is indicative of the difficulty for the Catholic Church in being associated with the death penalty, the Holocaust, and war crimes.⁴²⁷ Muench acknowledged Ohlendorf's guilt, but the Catholic Church as a whole took a stance against the death penalty from the very beginning of the trial process.

Ohlendorf's best attempts to have his sentence commuted failed. From February to June 1951, his appeals for clemency stopped, and he presumably focused on settling any unfinished affairs. He wrote a testament in which he asked that the following passage be read at his funeral: "And my last wish: Let no one invoke my life or my death for any purpose other than to do good."⁴²⁸ Leading up to his funeral, Ohlendorf wrote this testament, and was visited by clerics, including the Anthroposophist minister Dr. Werner Haverbeck, who would perform the burial of Ohlendorf in Hoheneggelsen.⁴²⁹ Ohlendorf was executed by hanging. He never wavered in his devotion to National Socialism, and believed until the end that

⁴²⁷ For more on Muench see Colman James Barry, *American Nuncio: Cardinal Aloisius Muench* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Saint John's University Press, 1969).

⁴²⁸ Ohlendorf's written funeral testament, in Goldhagen, "The 'Humanist' as a Mass Murderer", Goldhagen had privileged access to this document because his father, historian Erich Goldhagen, was given copies of documents by Ohlendorf's widow and had interviewed her personally, several times. This particular document, cited by Goldhagen, is entitled "Geist der Versöhnung über Otto Ohlendorfs Grab," from the personal possession of Käthe Ohlendorf.

⁴²⁹ See mention of Werner Haverbeck in the "Early Life and Career" section of this essay. For reference to Ohlendorf's testament and last days in prison see Käthe Ohlendorf's *Letter to David Irving*.

everything he did was just, right, and for the greater good of Germany. In the end, he never showed any repentance for the actions of *Einsatzgruppe D*.

Conclusion

Chief Prosecutor Benjamin Ferencz stated that of the 3,000 members of the *Einsatzgruppen* who should be brought to trial, only twenty-four, two of whom dropped out, were tried because that was precisely how many seats they had in the block.⁴³⁰ Ferencz made every effort not to have any outside contact with the defendants during the trial, most likely because he was Jewish and did not want to seem vengeful or biased against them. However, he went to see Ohlendorf, after he was sentenced and read the verdict, to inquire if there were anything Ferencz could do, personally, for Ohlendorf. Ohlendorf replied to Ferencz “the Jews in America will suffer for this,” and according to Ferencz, Ohlendorf “died convinced that he was right and I was wrong.”⁴³¹ Given the character and personality of Ohlendorf, together with his self-righteous belief in National Socialism, there is little doubt he

⁴³⁰ Of the twenty-four, two left the trial for different reasons. Dr. Dr. Otto Rasch, commander of *Einsatzgruppe C*, was visibly convulsing during parts of the trial and was dismissed for medical attention relating to Parkinson’s Disease, and died soon after he was released for treatment. Emil Haussmann, leader of *Einsatzkommando 12* (under Ohlendorf’s command of *Einsatzgruppe D*) committed suicide in July 1947. For more on these men in the trial, see Earl’s *SS-Einsatzgruppen Trial*.

⁴³¹ Benjamin Ferencz and Otto Ohlendorf, Post-Trial verbal exchange, cited in Andrew Nagorski, *The Nazi Hunters* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016), 57. The many interviews, written accounts, and lecture transcripts from Ferencz’s website, all cite the same exchange with Ohlendorf.

either whole-heartedly believed his crimes were justified or, if he had any doubts, that he would never admit to wrongdoing.

The defense argument would have been quite strong, if the defendants had all aligned and planned their testimonies to perfection. This was not the case. Ohlendorf's pre-trial testimony, in which he outlined the mass murder committed by the *Einsatzgruppen*, was basically accepted. This left Aschenauer with little choice but to adopt an unusual line of defense, which was also called for because this was an unprecedented trial with uniquely devised charges.⁴³² The defense conceded that Ohlendorf had committed and led mass murder, but argued that Ohlendorf and other defendants were following orders. These alleged orders superseded the ability of the *Einsatzgruppen* leaders to call them into question. This argument was repeatedly discussed with Ohlendorf, even to the point of admitting he would kill his own sister. The defense thought the "orders" argument was quite sound, at least as was uniformly argued by the defendants, until Willy Seibert was questioned as to whether he would kill his parents in the name of Führer Orders. He said he could not answer, and as Musmanno recalled: "The faces of the other defendants in the dock dropped. 'Why, you idiot,' they seemed to say, 'that is our whole case.'"⁴³³

⁴³² See the CSDIC (UK) complete reports, especially the September, 1945 report. From Ohlendorf, the British were able to piece together the precise composition of the RSHA, SS, *Einsatzgruppen* and many other important aspects of the Nazi party. Because he was allegedly so forthright, the interrogators had no real reason to believe Ohlendorf would lie about mundane details like the number of employees, their names and ranks, of the majority of the RSHA.

⁴³³ Musmanno, *Eichmann Kommandos*, 129.

Seibert answered in the negative, saying “I would not do so.”⁴³⁴ He had just demonstrated to the court that he was not a mindless soldier, that he enacted mass murder through decision-making.

The testament written by Ohlendorf requires examination. It is referred to by his widow, Käthe, in her “Letter to David Irving.” According to Mrs. Ohlendorf, he compiled a great deal of evidence as to his direct relationship with the Army, Manstein, and the Tatars, including photos, written affidavits, and other information that point to an alleged unity of purpose in carrying out the Holocaust. Referring back to the fact that Ohlendorf thought the Americans would try him as a member of the military, and not as head of the “special” *Einsatzgruppen* forces, Käthe Ohlendorf made it her personal quest to have her husband exonerated. Perhaps they were both correct in thinking the trials were biased against him, given that in comparison to other cases, he received the harshest punishment. Also, in her letter to David Irving, a known Holocaust denier, Mrs. Ohlendorf’s motive is to enlist the help of Irving by writing to him and providing him with this so-called evidence.

When Judge Musmanno referred to Ohlendorf as “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” it is simple to understand how he came to that characterization. Regarding his attitude in captivity, arrogance in the courts, and his position as a top-level Nazi, it seems he *was* this dualistic character. Looking more closely at how he performed his job, at every level and every step along the way, Ohlendorf was a careerist, driven by his absolutely faithful and untarnished belief in National Socialism. There

⁴³⁴ *TWC*, 172. Note that Seibert was asked if he, himself, could kill the parents of Jewish children begging to spare their lives, and he again, answered in the negative. Hilary Earl in “Scales of Justice,” points to this moment at the trial when the defense collapsed.

is an apparent contradiction between careerism and ideological commitment, but in the case of Ohlendorf, these opposing forces were compatible.

Hanno Sowade perfectly summarized Ohlendorf in life, character, and in the trial this way: “the court could not fully make up its mind about this ‘Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde’ as the chairman of the Military Tribunal called him – the correct economist and civil servant, who had fought selflessly for the interests of the middle classes, and the mass murderer all in the person of Ohlendorf.”⁴³⁵ But this characterization is only superficially correct. Taking into account the fact that he was an *Alter Kämpfer*, the Jekyll and Hyde sides of Ohlendorf were not that easily separable. From the trial, there are many lessons learned. Most significantly, the amount of weight put on the validity and “truth” of Ohlendorf’s testimony, despite the fact that the prosecution had numerous documents as evidence, is staggering. Granted, he was well known for his severe honesty, self-righteousness, and fervent (or violent in the *Einsatzgruppen*) dedication to National Socialism. However, why would he not lie, even a little? Taking the word of a perpetrator unabashedly and using it to wield the power of life and death in a trial is careless; the process should be further scrutinized.

⁴³⁵ Sowade, “Otto Ohlendorf,” 163.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion

Otto Ohlendorf was an economist, lawyer, Nazi party functionary, National Socialist ideologue, and perpetrator of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The purpose of researching the life of Ohlendorf is to understand and appreciate, in the greater picture of motivation, the patterns in his life and personality that lead to the greatest crime of his career: his leadership of the *Einsatzgruppen*. In composing an analysis comprised of different aspects of his life, much is gained in learning about what his criminal motivations may have been. His crimes were heinous and so significant that he was executed for them. Central to this study is examining perpetration on an individual level, considering biographical and psychological characteristics of the Ohlendorf. This is more significant than simply stating that Ohlendorf was a typical German, who like all others, wanted to kill Jews; this is an irresponsible claim.

Despite Ohlendorf's criticism of Nazi policies, ultimately, he was responsible for the deaths of 90,000 people. Like most Nuremberg defendants, he asserted that they had an inability to act otherwise, a statement cited numerous times. Goldhagen views this as a perpetrator speaking for all others, "what else could we have done?" Instead, it should be treated as an individual viewpoint, rather than a collective 'one size fits all' explanation.⁴³⁶ In the end, it is less significant from whom the orders came, and when. Ohlendorf's guilt is absolutely undeniable, but placing him into a

⁴³⁶ Goldhagen, *Willing Executioners*, 401.

general category of perpetrators is misleading. He was an *Alter Kämpfer*, elitist and privileged in Nazi Germany. This entire dissertation focuses on how the conditions of his life, career, and personality together led to his role in the perpetration of the Holocaust. The one theme present in all of these conditions is Ohlendorf's identity as an *Alter Kämpfer*. In order to better study perpetrator motives, Browning's approach leads to clearer understandings of how, why and under what conditions the Holocaust unfolded, especially in the Soviet Union. Case studies are extremely important in comprehending the greater picture of not only the enactment of the Final Solution, but also in showing how Nazi Germany, the supposedly well-oiled machine, was in fact deeply dysfunctional. How can anyone begin to understand how a particular person enacted mass murder without first trying to comprehend the motivations, their career, and life conditions of the accused? This case study featuring Otto Ohlendorf has been fruitful.

The motivations of Ohlendorf have become more clearly defined. Although anti-Semitism was a major aspect of National Socialist ideology, Ohlendorf enacted mass murder because he was a careerist and wanted to thrive at each job he was to undertake. Likewise, he claimed the Jews and partisans posed a direct threat to the progress and survival of Germany. He succeeded so much that he received the highest of promotions throughout his career, from lieutenant to major general. Despite his alleged reluctance to be transferred to the front, Ohlendorf's career greatly benefited from the experience. Although he attributed the transfer orders to some sort of grudge with Himmler and Heydrich, once Ohlendorf accepted the fact, he met this new assignment with the same efficiency as any other task he was given.

He was an *Alter Kämpfer* and careerist. If he had not gone to the Eastern Front, his career might have faltered. Worse yet, his loyalty could have been called into question, a completely unthinkable scenario for Ohlendorf.

How could someone so apparently intelligent become a mass murderer and think his job was morally justified? Ohlendorf's motivations were rooted in personal and professional opportunism and a purist interpretation of National Socialism. He truly believed that the murder of 90,000 innocent people was an acceptable act necessary to support the Nazi's ideological war in the name of expanding and preserving Germany. His ideology was centered around devotion to the Reich and National Socialism, inseparable from his careerism. The connecting factor was his elitist status as an *Alter Kämpfer*. He could not *really* be reprimanded for insubordination, but at the same time, his dedication to the early values of the Nazi party made him an unwavering supporter of the ideological cause. This led him to be a perpetrator, a task he most likely did not enjoy as he oversaw the murder of tens of thousands of men, women, and children. Nevertheless, he justified it (perhaps only to himself and his soldiers) and deduced that committing genocide was absolutely essential to the survival of Germany, National Socialism, and his own life.

Despite Ohlendorf's military experience and lack of desire to take up arms, he morphed from National Socialism's ideological soldier to a perpetrator of mass murder. The *Alter Kämpfer* in him transitioned from academic policy-maker to genocidal killer. Analyzing perpetrator motivation is problematic because general statements and generic characterizations are not appropriate. The goal of this

dissertation is not to explain why Ohlendorf commanded the execution of 90,000 Jews and partisans. It is clear why; he was anti-Semitic and a careerist, as were most of his German contemporaries. Anti-Semitism was not confined only to Ohlendorf, only to perpetrators, only to Nazis, or only to Germans. If that had been the case, the *Einsatzgruppen* in particular would have had much more difficulty enlisting the help of local paramilitary groups and citizens of the Soviet Union to assist in their gruesome task. The *Einsatzgruppen* all used local help in their mission to clear the land, persecute, document, and round up the local unwanted persons (gypsies, Ashkenazis, Jews, Roma, the disabled, criminals, or other groups), dig the mass graves if a ravine did not already exist, escort the victims to their gravesite, and execute them. Without the support of locals in pogroms like Babi Yar, the murders at Majdanek and Lublin, etc., the Nazis would most likely have had to amass larger forces to support the extensive liquidation activities of the *Einsatzgruppen*.

Although perpetrators deserve blame, there is risk in how and to what degree blame is placed. Yes, Ohlendorf should certainly have been tried and sentenced for the magnitude of his horrific crimes. This issue extends into a debate over whether Nazis like Ohlendorf were punished enough. Yet of all the *Einsatzgruppen* perpetrators, only twenty-four were tried. The Allies felt they did not have the evidence, or resources, to manage the conviction of the 3,000 *Einsatzgruppen* killers.

Concerning future studies related to Ohlendorf, this thesis has exposed gaps in the scholarship that, even in this conclusion, remain unanswered. For instance,

more exploration and research is necessary regarding the Nazis and Ohlendorf's relationship with the Anthroposophical Society. Argued here is that the society was influential in Ohlendorf's life, and his involvement with its defense may have possibly played a small role in Himmler's transfer order that placed Ohlendorf in command of *Einsatzgruppe D*. More plausibly, a deeper analysis could reveal an intricate interconnectedness between particular members of the Nazi party and the Anthroposophical Society.

In addition to Ohlendorf's ties to the Anthroposophical Society, his link to academic radicalism could prove to be interesting. He was connected with Jessen and other members of the universities of Kiel and Berlin who spoke out against Nazi policy to the point of anarchy, as Jessen and many other academics were involved in the 20 July plot. Precisely what were Ohlendorf and Jessen lecturing and writing about while at the universities, building new departments of economics together? Exactly why were they both asked to leave under suspicious circumstances not once, but twice? Was there any backlash against Ohlendorf when Jessen was arrested for involvement in the 20 July plot? Was Ohlendorf questioned about it? Why or why not, considering his ties to Jessen? Why did these two men have an apparent falling out after Jessen encouraged Ohlendorf to join the SD?

Looking further at the *Trial*, Hilary Earl has certainly led the way for the most recent writing on the *Einsatzgruppen* Trial. Where this topic can lead is analyzing Ohlendorf's claims for being tried under the *Saubere Wehrmacht* defense, and how he specifically handled his three years in prison, after sentencing. As the commanding officer of *Einsatzgruppe D*, Ohlendorf was sentenced to death on all

three counts. Other *Einsatzgruppen* leaders who made it through the trial process were all dealt the same sentence.

Questions about accountability still arise, albeit more infrequently than after the war, and with occurrences like Darfur, Rwanda, Bosnia and other genocidal incidences of today's world, they are still relevant. Because mass murders, pogroms, and terrible acts of violence dominate particular areas of the world, scholars and legal experts continually look back to the Nazi Holocaust for precedents to set just standards of order of the world. Unfortunately, most often governing bodies such as the United Nations are unsuccessful at preventing genocide, despite the continuous amount of analyses of the Holocaust.

The goal of this dissertation is to analyze the life and career of Holocaust perpetrator Otto Ohlendorf in a way that demonstrates particular, relevant themes in Nazi Germany and Holocaust studies. Focusing on careerism and National Socialist ideology, Ohlendorf's life and career reveal how he was allowed to flourish in the Nazi party and government through the privileges of being an *Alter Kämpfer*. It is difficult to say whether his meteoric rise to the top of the Nazi careerist echelon was solely dependent on the *Alter Kämpfer* status. But along with the status came the responsibility of Ohlendorf to substantiate his commitment to National Socialism and the party. Although Ohlendorf argued against wanting to assume the role of mass murderer with *Einsatzgruppe* During the trial at Nuremberg, there was little doubt that his command of the group became a significant determinant of his future promotions. He may not have liked leading genocide, but his commitment to

the ideology made him the ideal candidate to have a thriving career in Nazi Germany.

In conclusion, this dissertation concludes with the future in mind. Why is the Holocaust and its perpetrators still a relevant and significant area of study? If genocide still occurs, why bother to analyze perpetrator motivation? If the world cannot appropriately legislate racist acts, violence, and war, then it is the job of scholars, researchers, and historians to write more, analyze more, and to make more people aware of genocide and hate as criminal acts. Deciding what is moral and what just punishment may be is not for me to decide. Instead, my job is to attempt to make sense of perpetration and bring a better understanding of how and why it occurs. The study of Otto Ohlendorf is one more step toward comprehending the past, with the hope that the future can prevent ideological horrors like the Holocaust.

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